

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1980

\$1.50



47744

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by Brett Halliday

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Novelet
MURDER UNDER
THE CHRISTMAS
TREE
by W.L. Fieldhouse

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Book Reviews
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ED NOON'S
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DECEMBER
1980
VOLUME 44
No. 12
ISSN 0026-3621

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDWARD GOLDSTEIN
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Publishers

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY
MAGAZINE, Vol. 44 No.12
December 1980. Published
monthly by Renown Publica-
tions, Inc., P.O. Box 178,
Reseda, CA 91335. Subscrip-
tion, One Year (12 issues)
\$12.00; Two Years (24 issues)
\$20.00; Canada, One Year
\$15.00; Two Years \$26.00;
Foreign, One Year \$18.00;
Two Years \$30.00 (U.S.
Funds Only). Second Class
postage paid at Van Nuys,
CA and at additional mailing
offices. Events and characters
in this magazine are wholly
fictitious. Copyright © 1980
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tional and Pan-American
Conventions. Printed in the
United States of America.
Postmaster — return P.O.
Box 178 Reseda, CA 91335.

ALL THE FACES OF FEAR

by Brett Halliday

The animal was huge, with thick black fur, small eyes that glinted, and sharp teeth that Shayne could see as it opened its mouth to let out a furious roar. The beady eyes fastened on Shayne, trapped in its cage, and it took another step forward, arms coming up to reach for its victim...6

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

W.L. FIELDHOUSE (*Murder Under The Christmas Tree*), creator of the popular Major Lansing of the CID, was born in Salem, Ohio. After completing high school, he spent several months in Washington, D.C., then enlisted in the U.S. Army. He spent 2½ years in Germany attached with S-2, Army Intelligence and also was assigned to a special security police force. His recent action-adventure novel, *KLAW*, will be part of a series coming from Tower Publications. He has another series, *SIXGUN SAMURAI*, written in collaboration, which will be published by Pinnacle Books.



V.C. KREUITER (*Mr. Bartholomew*) says:

I'm married, by vocation a typographer. I have two daughters, both lovely.

My tastes in fiction are wide. I've just finished reading novels by Booth Tarkington and Ishmael Reed. Oh, and Ross MacDonald. I'm nuts about hard boiled. I plan on being a private dick in my next incarnation.

I love rock and roll. All kinds. I play woodwinds and harp and periodically make a little money at it.

My goal is to win an Edgar before I'm seventy-five. And to write the first murder mystery/rock opera.

MICHELLE LUNDGREN (*What Has Evy Done?*) is a former New Yorker recently transplanted to Southern California. Although constantly inspired to write horror and mystery fiction, she is a nice, middle-class wife and mother, but wildly ambitious and totally devoted to the avant-garde. In love with the bizarre and the gruesome side of life, Michelle has written several other terror-filled short stories, a novel on the occult, and is hoping to be a female version of Stephen King. When not typing her fingers to bloody stubs, she chauffeurs her star-struck ten-year-old daughter

on casting calls and helps her illustrator-husband with his work. CARL LUNDGREN has done seventy-five paperback covers for major publishing companies and has won numerous awards at conventions. His cover illustration for this month's MSMM will show you why.

SUSANNE SHAPHREN (*Beyond a Shadow*) tells us:

A former newspaper reporter, I retired (at 21) to pursue a freelance career. BEYOND A SHADOW OF DOUBT marks the first time my work has been accepted by a mystery magazine, BUT it's not my first published mystery story. My mysteries have appeared in WEIGHT WATCHERS, green's (a literary qtrly.), GEM (an x-rated publication in which I was the only "lady" paid to appear with her clothes on!) and FARM WIFE NEWS.

My non-mystery fiction & articles have appeared in a variety of national publications. Your readers might be interested in the "mystery" of how somebody who downs 4-5 drinks every single year winds up being included in an anthology titled HAVING BEEN THERE, THE PERSONAL DRAMA OF ALCOHOLISM, but that's another story . . .

ROBERT TURNER does not have a story in this issue, but he has appeared in past issues of MSMM. His byline has also appeared in more mystery magazines than most people can remember, as well as a vast variety of magazines in other fields. He wrote many mystery/suspense novels under his own and pen names. He created scripts for television and movies. He was a pro. Give him an assignment to write something, and he wrote it — competently, entertainingly. He was a top-rated member of MENSA, and a former officer in the Mystery Writers of America. Several years ago, Sherbourne Press published his hardcover autobiography, **SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE WRITERS, BUT I WOULDN'T WANT MY DAUGHTER TO MARRY ONE.** (His daughter didn't, by the way!) It saddens me now to report that Bob died of cancer on 31 August 1980, at age 65. As his lovely wife Peggy told me, at least Bob's work lives on; that's something a lot of people don't have. He was a good writer. But more than that, Bob Turner was a Good Person — a witty, intelligent, filled-with-humor, truly Nice Guy, whose friends valued his friendship. We'll miss him.

ALL THE FACES OF FEAR

by BRETT HALLIDAY



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MIKE SHAYNE LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR, BEHIND HIS DESK and said, "Twelve?"

His secretary Lucy Hamilton nodded. "Twelve," she said. "Why don't you talk to him, Michael? He's awfully cute."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

Lucy shook her head. "No, just that he wanted to see Mr. Shayne, the private detective."

Frowning, Shayne tugged at his left earlobe with knobby fingers. After a moment, he said, "All right, Angel, send him in. I'm curious. I'd like to know what a twelve-year-old kid wants with a shamus."

Lucy went back into the outer office and returned a moment later with a small boy at her side. She said, "Mr. Shayne, this is Andrew Fenton. Andrew, this is Mr. Shayne."

The boy stepped forward and stuck out his hand. Shayne shook it, his face serious, then waved at the client's chair on the other side of the desk. "Sit down, Andrew, and tell me how we can help you."

Andrew Fenton sat down. He was slender, with a thin, expressive face, red hair a shade lighter than Shayne's own, and an abundance of freckles. Shayne thought he looked like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

"Let me make it clear right away," Andrew said, "I am not crazy."

Lucy stared at the boy, her surprise at his words showing. Shayne was able to confine his reaction to a slight frown, and he said, "Why would anybody think you're crazy?"

"Because of the dreams," Andrew answered. "They think I have something wrong with me psychologically."

"Who's they?"

"My father and my teacher, mainly. I told them about the dreams, and I think they wanted to laugh at me. Of course, they were too polite to actually do it, but I could tell what they were thinking."

Shayne held up a hand. "Slow down," he said. "What's in these dreams to make people think there's something wrong?"

"Does that mean you'll take my case?"

Shayne had a feeling that this kid could get grown-ups confused pretty easily. All kids had that ability to a certain extent, but Andrew Fenton looked like a real pro.

"What case is that?" Shayne asked.

"I want you to find out who the dead person was. I want to know why he was buried there. And I want to know who killed him, and why."

This time it was harder for Shayne to control his features. He wanted to gape at the twelve-year-old, the way Lucy was doing. Instead he

took a deep breath and said, "I think you'd better start at the beginning."

All right," Andrew said. "I've been having nightmares, very bad ones, and when I told my father about them, he thought there was something wrong with my head, that I was having some sort of mental problem because of my mother."

"What does your mother have to do with this?" Shayne asked.

"She left us, about six months ago."

Lucy's face softened as she said, "Oh, I'm sorry."

Andrew turned toward her and said, "That's all right, Miss Hamilton. She didn't die. She just left. She told my father that she wasn't fulfilled being a wife and mother."

Shayne considered the boy for a moment. He seemed to be a cool and unflappable kid. Not the type to be plagued by nightmares. Shayne said, "Go on about these dreams. What happens in them?"

Andrew faced Shayne across the desk again and said, "They're very strange. I-I seem to be lost in them, and I can't tell where I am. And then I see the two of them digging the grave."

"The two of them?"

"The skinny man and the little man. They both look really weird, because the skinny man is about seven-feet tall and so skinny he looks like a telephone pole, and the little man can't be over three feet tall. But both of them have shovels, and they're digging this long narrow hole. At first, I didn't realize it was a grave, but then I saw them put this man inside it, and then they started to cover him up. What else could it be but a grave?"

Shayne nodded. "It certainly sounds like one. You see this in your dream every time?"

"Yes, sir. It's always the same. But that's not all of it. After they've covered the man up, they turn around and see me and start to chase me. I run away from them but the skinny man has such long arms, and I'm afraid to look back over my shoulder, because I know he's reaching for me, and I'm getting tired and I know they're going to catch me and put me in a hole in the ground, too . . . and that's when I usually wake up."

The boy's attitude had become more and more tense as he spoke. His face was pale now and he swallowed nervously as he finished telling about his dreams. Shayne could tell that despite his calm exterior earlier, Andrew Fenton was a very disturbed young man, disturbed in the sense that he was upset about something. Shayne wasn't about to make a diagnosis of his mental state. That was for the professionals.

"All right, Andrew," he began slowly.

"Call me Andy. All my friends do."

"Okay, Andy." Shayne put a grin on his rugged face. "I hope that means we'll be friends."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Shayne, I'm sure we will be."

"If you're Andy, then I'm Mike. But listen, Andy, even though that's a scary dream, I don't think it's enough to make people think you're crazy. Is there something else?"

Andy nodded solemnly. "It's not just a dream, Mr. Sh — Mike. It really happened, I really *saw* them burying a man. I'm not sure when or where, it's . . . it's all kind of hazy, but I know it really happened. It must have."

Shayne scraped a thumbnail along his jawline, wished for a cigarette and decided not to light one while the boy was in the office. "You told your dad all about this?"

"Yes. That's why he and Miss Marshall think I'm crazy now. They think I'm making it all up."

"Who's this Miss Marshall?"

"My teacher. I don't go to a regular school. I never have. My father has always hired tutors."

Shayne and Lucy exchanged glances. Shayne said, "Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"No, sir, I'm an only child."

Shayne leaned back again and considered. This was a smart, well-educated kid, that much was obvious. His attitude was serious and mature, and he didn't seem to be the type who would be given to flights of fancy. And yet he was an only child, who had never attended public school, who had probably never associated much with other kids. A set-up like that could produce some pretty off-the-wall reactions in a child. Shayne didn't have to be a child psychologist to know that.

Andy was staring at him expectantly. The big detective said carefully, "I'm not sure I can help you, Andy. I don't see much in your situation that a private detective would be good for. You need somebody with experience dealing with dreams."

"Like a psychiatrist," Andy sighed. "I guess you think I'm crazy, too."

"Now wait a minute," Shayne said, starting to feel exasperated. "I didn't say that. You want me to find some proof that what you see in your dream really happened, right?"

Andy nodded.

"I just don't see how I can, though," Shayne went on, "not without more facts to go on. Now, if I knew a place to start . . ."

"You could talk to my father and Miss Marshall, maybe hang around the house some," Andy said. "You see, I didn't tell you all of it yet. I'm sure they're still after me. I saw them burying a man, and I know they want to kill me, too, so I can't ever tell on them. I told my father that, and now he believes more than ever that I'm just being paranoid."

Now where the hell had the kid picked up that? Shayne tugged at his ear again. Lucy was looking from Andy to him with compassion in her eyes, and he could tell that she had fallen for the little guy. Nothing would satisfy her maternal instincts now except for Shayne to help him.

The only problem was, Shayne didn't have the slightest idea how to go about it.

"Listen, Andy," he said, "what gave you the idea of coming to see me, anyway?"

"I've read about you a lot in the paper. I know you've solved a bunch of cases that nobody else could. That's how I knew you could solve mine. You see, I've got it figured out. The man that was being buried, somebody had to have killed him. It's got to be murder."

A declaration like that, considering the source, was just one more layer of puzzlement in a morning that had turned definitely strange. Shayne knew he couldn't just run Andy Fenton out of the office, but he didn't know how to proceed. He was used to dealing with grown-ups, not with kids who claimed to have witnessed a murder but who couldn't remember where or when.

Andy was leaning forward and looking at him intently now. "Will you do it, Mike? Will you take the case and at least give it a try?"

Shayne glanced hopelessly at Lucy, who didn't help a bit by nodding firmly. He growled, "Maybe . . ."

"I can afford to pay you," Andy said. "My father's wealthy, and he gives me an allowance. I've been saving up for some new model rockets, but I'd rather use the money for your retainer."

Shayne started to say, "Wait a minute," but Andy was digging in his pockets and coming up with bills. He pulled money from every pocket and dropped it on the desk. Folded and wrinkled twenties, tens, and fives.

Andy said, "I raided my bank, too. There's \$485 there, Mike. Is that enough?"

"You don't have to —" Shayne began again.

"I want it to be perfectly legal. I realize I'm underage and can't sign a contract, but if you'll have Miss Hamilton give me a receipt for my money and not mention my age on it . . . We can keep things on a strictly cash basis, and that way you won't have to worry."

"Dammit," Shayne said, ignoring the look of disapproval that Lucy flashed him, "are you sure you're really a little kid?"

Shayne had seen the fear in the boy's eyes when he described the dreams, though, and knew that under the surface was a very frightened child. He said, "I'll take the case, but I can't promise you what the results will be. Those dreams may just be nightmares, Andy, and if that's the case, I can't do anything about them."

"I understand that. I think you'll find there's something to them, though."

Shayne stood up. "Okay. Why don't you go into the outer office for a minute while I talk to Miss Hamilton? Then, I'll take you home, and I can talk to your dad and your teacher."

"All right," Andrew nodded. "But they'll tell you I'm crazy."

He went into the outer office and shut the door behind him as Shayne looked at Lucy. She said, "He's so sweet and so sad, Michael. Do you think you can help him?"

"I'm a PI, not a shrink," he growled. "Maybe what the kid needs most is a friend, though, and I can try to be that. Maybe if I poke around a little bit, act like I take him seriously, that'll satisfy him enough. It might even get rid of the nightmares, for all I know. I'll give the money back to his dad, of course."

Lucy came up on her toes to plant a kiss on his gaunt cheek. "Thank you, Michael. I know you're doing it for me as much as anything."

"Hell," Shayne grinned, "I guess we've all got a soft spot for kids and dogs." He started for the door, then wheeled around and pointed a finger at Lucy. "Don't get any ideas, though. I don't do divorce work or take cases from cocker spaniels."

II

ANDY HAD TAKEN A TAXI TO SHAYNE'S OFFICE on Flagler Street in downtown Miami. The two of them got into the detective's Buick, and Shayne said, "Just where do you live?"

"Over in Bal Harbour. It's not hard to find." Andy gave Shayne the address, and the redhead pointed the Buick toward Miami Beach.

As they crossed Biscayne Bay on one of the causeways, Shayne asked, "I suppose you miss your mother pretty bad, don't you?"

Andy didn't answer for a moment, and Shayne wondered if he had done the wrong thing by asking this blunt question. Then Andy said, "Sure I miss her. And I know Dad does. But I guess she just did what she felt like she had to do. I want her to be happy, and I hope she is."

"Have you heard from her since she left?"

Andy shook his head. "Not yet. My father says she'll write or call when she feels ready to talk to us again."

Shayne bit back the curse that came to his lips. He didn't know either of Andy's parents yet, didn't know why his mother had felt like she had to leave her family behind, but he knew it was a damn shame that a kid like Andy was left like that, probably wondering if he had caused it all. Most people did their best, Shayne mused, only sometimes it wasn't enough. And then it was usually the innocents who got hurt.

Shayne turned north when he reached Miami Beach, and it wasn't long before they were in the exclusive residential suburb of Bal Harbour. Andy told him where to turn off the wide boulevard that paralleled the ocean. A few minutes later, still following Andy's directions, Shayne pulled the Buick into a blacktop driveway that circled through a large lawn and led to a two story house that was large, sprawling, and very expensive looking. Shayne could see a three-car garage at the rear of it, and an even larger backyard. Shrubs and large palm trees surrounded the house. It was an estate worth a lot of money. Shayne wondered what it was like for a boy growing up there with only adults for company.

As Shayne brought the Buick to a stop before the front door and killed the engine, the door opened and a young woman hurried out. She saw Andy getting out of the car and said sharply, "Andrew! Where have you been all morning? Your father and I were worried about you."

"I had some business to take care of," Andy said. "Miss Marshall, this is Mr. Shayne."

Shayne nodded to the young woman and said, "Hello, Miss Marshall."

She was in her middle twenties, Shayne saw, with a heartshaped face and dark brown hair that fell to her shoulders. The slacks and blouse she wore showed she had a fine figure, and she didn't look like Shayne's idea of a tutor. Andy would probably have a crush on her before too many more years, if he didn't already.

She said, "Hello. Thank you for bringing Andy home, and I'm sorry if he's been bothering you —"

"He hasn't been bothering me at all," Shayne said. "He's just hired me."

Confusion was evident on Miss Marshall's attractive face. "I don't understand," she said. "What do you mean, he hired you?"

"Mr. Shayne is a private detective," Andy replied before Shayne could say anything. "He's going to investigate my nightmares and try to find out what's causing them."

"I . . . see," she said slowly. "Go on in the house, Andrew. Your father wants to speak to you. He's in the study, I believe."

Andy didn't look too thrilled by the prospect, but he went into the house, looking over his shoulder and saying, "I'll see you later, Mike."

"Right, Andy," Shayne said.

Miss Marshall waited until the front door had closed behind Andy, then turned blazing eyes on Shayne. In a low voice, she asked, "Did you take money from him?"

"He gave me a retainer."

"How despicable!" she hissed. "To take money from a seriously disturbed child like that and then lie to him!"

"He's disturbed, all right. He's disturbed because his father and you think he's crazy and you won't take him seriously," Shayne said bluntly. "At least I told him I'd keep an open mind while I'm looking into this business. And I didn't lie to him. I fully intend to investigate."

The fury on her face had abated somewhat at Shayne's words. She said, "Surely you don't believe his story about the nightmares. Did he tell you all of it, the grotesque descriptions of the men he claims to have seen, the fact that he thinks it was all real and that now they're after him as well?"

"Yeah, he told me all of that."

"And you accept it?"

"I accept the fact that he believes it," Shayne said. "He came to me asking for help. I intend to give it to him, even if it's only proving to him that he is imagining things. At least maybe he'll sleep better."

Shayne's voice had been sharp, and now the young woman dropped her eyes and looked slightly sheepish. She said, "Perhaps I misjudged you, Mr. Shayne. I'm Anne Marshall. I'm in charge of Andrew's education."

"He told me about you. And as far as the money goes, you don't have to worry. I don't intend to keep it. I thought I'd give it back to the boy's father. Andy seemed to consider it a point of honor that he give me a retainer, though."

"I did misjudge you. Why don't you come in the house, and we can talk this over."

Shayne followed her into the big house, through a foyer and a long hall to a large, airy room at the rear of the house. Sliding glass doors led out into the well-manicured backyard.

Anne strolled over to a bar on one wall and asked, "Would you like a drink?"

"It's still a little early for me," Shayne said. "I'd rather talk about Andy."

"Of course. What would you like to know?"

"When did the nightmares start?"

"About four months ago. At first they were only occasional, but they've become more and more frequent. Now he has them almost every night, sometimes more than once in a night."

"They started about two months after the boy's mother left, then?"

Anne nodded. "That's right."

"I suppose Andy and his mother got along all right?"

Anne smiled. "Certainly. What boy and his mother don't get along?"

"And you think Andy's nightmares are a result of his mother's desertion of her family?"

"It was a terrible blow to him, of course. We woke up one morning and she was gone. She left a note for Mr. Fenton, of course, but a note isn't much consolation to a twelve-year-old."

"Do you know exactly why she left?"

"Well . . . it really wasn't my place to worry about such things. I don't think Mrs. Fenton was happy with her marriage, and while she loved Andrew, he wasn't enough to hold her. I really couldn't give you any concrete reasons for her leaving, though."

Shayne lit a cigarette and said, "You don't think there's anything to the dreams, do you?"

"I think Andrew is upset by everything that's happened. The nightmares are a good way of getting attention. I certainly don't think he ever saw two men burying another one, and I can't believe that anyone would want to kill him."

"He is scared, though."

"Yes. I'll grant you that. And if you can ease his mind, I'll be grateful. I'm fond of him, Mr. Shayne, and I don't like to see him like he is. He covers it up well, but he's losing weight, becoming more high-strung. The present situation isn't good for him."

"I'll do all I can," Shayne grunted. "I think I'd like to talk to his father now."

"I'll see if Mr. Fenton is through talking to Andrew. We were really worried about him this morning. He didn't tell anyone he was leaving."

She started for the door, but before she could reach it, it opened and Andy stepped through, followed by a man in a conservative suit. Shayne put the man's age in the late forties. His broad face was beginning to show some lines, and his dark hair was liberally touched with silver. Andy said, "Mike, this is my father."

"Henry Fenton, Mr. Shayne," the man said, extending a hand which Shayne shook briefly. "I understand that Andrew has, ah, hired you."

"That's right," Shayne said. "You're worried about your nightmares, aren't you, Andy?"

"We're all worried about them, Mr. Shayne," Fenton said hurriedly. "But I hardly think we need to hire a private investigator because of them."

Shayne shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's a different approach, I'll say that. Most people who have trouble with their dreams run to a psychiatrist. Andy seems to think his dreams have a basis in reality, though. That's where I come in."

"Surely you don't believe the boy's outrageous story, Mr. Shayne."

Andy said wearily, "I'm right here, Dad. I'm not in the other room."

"Listen, Andy," Shayne said. "Your dad and I will hash this out, so why don't you let us talk it over in private?"

"He'll send you away," Andy said, his voice showing signs of truculence.

"You hired me; you're the only one who can fire me," Shayne said. "That's the way I operate, kid. So stop worrying and scoot on out of here."

Andy considered, then said, "Well, all right. I guess it's okay."

"I'll go with you, Andrew," Anne Marshall put in. "You need to work on your math for a while, anyway."

The two of them left the room, and then Henry Fenton turned to face Shayne. There was a sudden, undeniable air of tension in the room.

"Mr. Shayne," Fenton began, "surely you realize that I can't permit you to carry on any sort of mock investigation. It would only reinforce Andrew's fantasies and upset him even more."

"I agree. A mock investigation wouldn't do anybody any good. That's why I plan to play it straight and give Andy my best effort."

Fenton was taken aback. He said, "You can't . . . I won't allow it. Andrew's mental state is much too unstable —"

"Has he seen a psychiatrist?"

"Not yet. We've been trying to avoid that if we could. I hoped these dreams would go away —"

"If there is anything behind them, then the truth should get rid of them," Shayne said.

Fenton stared at Shayne, then suddenly said, "I understand now. You think you can get a big fee out of us. Well, let me tell you —"

"No, let *me* tell *you*," Shayne growled, his face gone bleak and hard. He reached in his pocket and came out with the money Andy had given him. He stuffed it in Fenton's jacket pocket as he said, "I like that kid, and I don't give a damn if I don't make a penny from this job. I've had enough big payoffs over the years to be able to afford to take a job just because I want to now and then."

He stalked toward the door. Fenton stood there looking surprised, until Shayne said, "I'll be talking to you." Then he looked around to see Shayne closing the door behind him.

Shayne stood for a moment in the hall, rubbing his jaw and wondering what the hell he had gotten into. He had taken the case out of curiosity and a liking for Andy Fenton. Both of those feelings had been intensified by this visit. Shayne had felt only friction between himself and Henry Fenton, and while Anne Marshall seemed to be a little bit more concerned about the boy, neither one of them showed any great desire to get to the bottom of Andy's nightmares. Maybe they were right, maybe there was nothing there but a small boy's trauma at the loss of his mother.

But whatever the case might be, Shayne intended to get to the bottom of it.

If he could figure out a place to start.

III

SHAYNE LEFT THE FENTON RESIDENCE a few minutes later, after finding Andy in the front yard, setting up a model rocket on the lawn. He had talked Anne Marshall out of the math assignment, postponing it until another time. Shayne said good-bye to him, promising to keep in close contact and telling Andy to call him any time it became necessary.

As he was driving away, Shayne wondered just what it was about the kid that was so likable. Maybe it was a matter of feeling sorry for him, growing up mostly by himself. Whatever it was, Shayne was determined to help him.

And the first step on that road, he had decided, was to get a little more information.

He crossed the Bay again to Miami, stopped for lunch at the Beef House, and then headed down town. His destination was an office in a tall building that housed many doctor's offices. The gilt lettering on the door Shayne entered proclaimed that it belonged to Dr. Leland Spencer, Psychologist.

A pretty receptionist looked up from her desk as Shayne said, "I'd like to see Dr. Spencer. My name is Mike Shayne."

"Do you have an appointment?" she asked in sugared tones.

"No, but the doctor and I are friends."

"Dr. Spencer is in with a patient right now. If you'll take a seat, though, you can wait for him."

Shayne sighed, sat down in a form-fitting chair that was never designed for his form, and listened to the bland almost-music coming mutedly over a concealed speaker. He flipped through a psychologist's trade journal, scanning articles on therapy and counseling. After fifteen minutes, he realized that he was damn glad he was a shamus and not a shrink.

Working in this atmosphere was enough to make a guy crazy.

The door to the inner office opened a few minutes later, and a glum-faced man wearing a poorly-fitting toupee stalked out, followed by Dr. Leland Spencer. The psychologist saw Shayne and exclaimed, "Mike! Good to see you. Come on in."

Shayne shook hands with the friendly, balding doctor and followed him into the office. He and Spencer were old friends, having met while Shayne was on a case several years earlier, and Shayne had called on him for information on a few occasions since. The chairs in the office were more comfortable than the ones in the waiting room, and Shayne settled down in one of them gratefully, lighting a cigarette.

"How are you, Mike?" Spencer asked as he sat down behind his large mahogany desk. "It's been a while since I've seen you."

"Too long," Shayne agreed. "I'm fine, I suppose, but I've got a few questions I'd like to ask you."

Spencer clasped his hands together in front of him. "I thought you might. You must be on a case involving some kind of mental aberration."

"Could be," Shayne allowed. "But then again, it might not be. What do you know about dreams?"

"According to who? Freud? Jung? Or maybe Shakespeare?"

"How about just a simple answer. What's the connection between the things we dream and the things we actually experience?"

Spencer smiled slightly and shook his head. "You don't ask much, do you? All right. There is a definite connection between our dreams

and our experiences. Some dreams come directly from past experiences. They may be almost exact replays of what happened to you, or they may be similar, up to a point, at which time the dream usually branches off in the direction we wish things had really gone. And there have been indications that some dreams are actually prophetic, instances where something a person dreams and remembers vividly will actually happen later, sometimes soon, sometimes as much as a few months later."

Shayne frowned. "How is that possible?"

Spencer shrugged and said, "I wish I could tell you. If I knew, I'd have the basis for a damn good paper for the next convention I attend. Really, Mike, dreams are still largely uncharted territory. We've made some progress in that area, but there's still a lot of research to be done."

Shayne leaned forward. "A dream can be based on an actual occurrence, though, and can duplicate it exactly?"

"Sure. It happens all the time." Spencer looked shrewdly at Shayne. "You don't think you're going to get to pick my brain for free, do you, Mike? You're going to have to tell me what this is all about."

"I'll be glad to. Lord knows, I need some help knowing where to start in this case. It's about as empty of leads as any I've ever been involved in."

Quickly, he sketched in the background of the case for Spencer, without mentioning any names. When he finished, Spencer leaned back, steepled his fingers, and said, "Interesting. It sounds like the boy is suffering from some kind of delusion brought on by his mother's desertion."

"That's what the father and the tutor think," Shayne grunted. "Isn't it possible he could have seen what he claims to have seen, though?"

"I wouldn't say it's very likely. The distorted descriptions, the fear of being pursued, those things make me think it's not based on a real incident."

"The tutor thinks it's just an attention-getter."

"That could be the case, too," Spencer said. "If you're thinking that this could turn into a murder investigation, I wouldn't count on it, Mike."

"I don't want it to. I just want the kid to get a fair shake. He seems so convinced of all of it, and nobody wants to listen to him."

"Except you," Spencer commented. "I've got a feeling there's a strong underdog factor in this case."

"Dammit," Shayne grinned, "don't you go analyzing me. There's

another thing I've been wondering about. If he did see something like he described, why can't he remember where and when he saw it?"

"Oh, that would be common enough." Spencer nodded, as if seeing an angle he hadn't considered. "Often, if a person sees something shocking enough, the mind tends to block it out, sometimes completely. It happens usually in children, but adults do the same thing sometimes. But when something bad happens to a child, it's not at all unusual for him to just . . . forget about it. If you don't think about it, it didn't happen."

"All right," Shayne said. "What it comes down to is this: the kid could be telling the exact truth, or it could all be in his head, there's no way of knowing."

Spencer held up a hand. "Wait a minute. The first part of that is right, but I never said there was no way of knowing. There is a way that might give us some answers."

Shayne sat forward eagerly. "What is it?"

"I'm not guaranteeing it would work, mind you, but I'm talking about hypnotism."

Shayne's craggy red brows drew down and together. "You can hypnotize a kid that young?"

"Sure, children are wonderful subjects. They still have a sense of fantasy; they're very suggestible. I could place this boy under hypnosis, maybe cut through those mists surrounding his dreams, and get to the real reasons behind them. Those reasons probably being the somewhat callous nature of his father, the loneliness and alienation of his environment, and what he sees as the unwarranted abandonment of him by his mother."

"Yeah," Shayne snorted. "Or he could have seen two weird-looking guys putting a stiff in the ground."

IV

HE WAS ON HIS WAY A FEW MINUTES LATER, headed back across the Bay. Spencer had told him that he had some time free later in the afternoon, and Shayne planned to put that time to good use. A session of hypnosis might be just the thing to get to the bottom of Andy's dreams. Shayne was firmly convinced that the dreams would go away when they knew what was causing them. At least he hoped so.

But the more he thought about it, the clearer the realization that Andy could be in real trouble. If the dreams were a reflection of something he had really seen and then blocked out from his conscious memory, then he had probably seen something he shouldn't have.

The images conjured up by the dream were those of a clandestine burial, and there would be no reason for secrecy unless something shady was going on.

Like maybe the disposal of a murder victim?

Shayne knew he was probably way off-base, that Andy's nightmares were more likely to be caused by a desire for attention than by anything he had actually witnessed. But in a situation like this, could anyone afford to accept the most likely answer without considering the other possibilities? If Andy was telling the truth, there might very well be someone after him, wanting to shut him up and keep him from talking about the burial.

It was worth a little bit of time and trouble, Shayne decided, to try to find the truth. Definitely worth it.

The mid-afternoon traffic was light as Shayne crossed the MacArthur Causeway to Miami Beach. He swung north, heading toward Bal Harbour, intending to pick up Andy at his house and return to Spencer's office with him. He was thinking about that and not paying too much attention to the cars around him, when some instinct made him swivel his head and glance over at a car that had pulled up beside him on the right.

Not for the first time, that instinct saved his life.

He saw a man hunched over the steering wheel, and in the rear window was a long, thin metal tube . . .

Shayne's foot jumped to the brake pedal and slammed down on it, sending the Buick to a rocking, tire-squealing stop, as the rifle barrel protruding from the rear window of the other car spouted lead and flame. Shayne heard the high-pitched whine as the bullet glanced off the hood of his car. He saw the flare of brake lights as the other car skidded to a stop.

Shayne had seen the rifle barrel in that split-second glance over at the other car, had seen it trained on his head. Another instant would have been too long.

He reached over now and grabbed a pistol from the glove compartment of his car, since he wasn't wearing his shoulder rig at the moment. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the other car backing up as he snapped the cylinder out, saw that it was fully loaded, and clicked it shut. He ducked and rolled across the seat;

There were two guns blasting at him now, the rifle and a pistol held by the driver. Shayne slapped the passenger door of the Buick open and dropped onto the pavement, coming up in a crouch beside the fender. The other car had backed up on the driver's side, so he had a little bit of cover. There wasn't much he could do with it, though;

the attackers were riddling the air with a fusillade of shots, and all Shayne could do was crouch and hope none of the bullets found its mark.

He dropped lower and sighted under the bottom of the Buick, then squeezed off three shots. All of them hit their targets, the front tires of the other car and a large foot. Shayne could see the tires start to go flat, though he couldn't hear the hiss of the escaping air over the roar of gunfire.

Silence suddenly fell over the impromptu battleground, and Shayne heard the sound of very rapid footsteps. A voice yelled, "Let's go, I'm hit!" and then there was the slam of a car door. The attackers took off.

Shayne leaped to his feet as the other car lurched down the road, the flat tires making its course erratic. At the rate it was going, it wouldn't take the high-powered Buick long to catch up to it.

Shayne reached for the door of his car, saw the rifle barrel come out of the rear window of the other vehicle again, and turned his motion into a headlong dive through the open window. He felt a sear of fiery pain across his back as he sprawled into the Buick, wiggling and twisting to get the rest of his body in before the rifleman could fire again.

He cursed in pain and anger as he struggled upright in the seat. There were the beginnings of a sticky wetness on his back, gluing his shirt and coat to his skin. He ignored it, forced the pain out of his mind, and hit the ignition, keeping his eyes on the fleeing car up ahead.

The engine turned over once, whined, and stopped.

"Hell!"

Shayne ground the motor, holding the key over and listening in growing frustration to the familiar sound. The bullets aimed at him may not have found their mark, but they had done some damage anyway. Shayne could tell by the sound of the engine that it was going to take some major repair before it would run again. Trying to start it was futile, and Shayne released the key.

He saw the other car turn a corner several blocks ahead and disappear. A long sigh escaped from his lips: There would be no catching up to them now. The would-be killers would be long gone before he could get after them.

Other cars had pulled to the curb back up the street, no doubt spooked by the firefight on the normally quiet street. Some of their occupants had gone running for cover, but others had stayed with their cars, and now some of them started to come forward cautiously, trying to peer into the Buick to see if its driver was still alive. Shayne opened the door, grimaced, and stepped out onto the asphalt.

A middle-aged man in khakis, windbreaker, and fishing cap stared at him and said, "You all right, mister?" Then he caught sight of the stain on Shayne's back and his mouth flopped open.

Shayne stood in the street, rubbing his jaw and glaring into the car at the red splotch on the seat. He had lost a fair amount of blood, and there was a slight dizziness swimming around in his head. He said to the man in the fishing cap, "Yeah, I'm okay. They creased me, but I'm afraid my car's in critical condition."

A crowd was starting to gather around him now, as more and more traffic stopped, and a determined-looking woman stepped up and said, "You'd better get that coat and shirt off. I'm a nurse, and I'll take care of that wound until the ambulance gets here."

"I won't need an ambulance," Shayne said, watching the lights of a Miami Beach patrol car as it came racing up the street. Somebody must have called in the shooting; Shayne would have been surprised if it had gone unreported.

"They just creased me," Shayne was telling the nurse as he took his coat and shirt off. The uniformed officers hurried up to him, saw the wound on his back, and one of them asked, "What the hell happened here?"

Shayne gestured at the bullet-pocked chassis of the Buick while the nurse examined the crease. "Somebody took exception to my driving," he said dryly. "They started blasting away at me with a rifle and pistol."

The officer was squinting in concentration at the big redhead, and his eyes suddenly lit up with recognition. "I know you!" he exclaimed. "You're that shamus from across the Bay, Mike Shayne."

"Right the first time," Shayne admitted. He watched the cops to see what tack they would take with their investigation of this incident. Shayne had clashed many times over the years with Peter Painter, the Miami Beach Chief of Police, and while he wasn't exactly *persona non grata* on this side of the Bay, neither was he the police department's favorite person. If the cops wanted to hassle him, they could easily keep him tied up for the rest of the afternoon over a shooting like this.

"Why don't you tell us about it?" one of the cops said, his voice noncommittal.

"I was driving north here, when I looked over and saw another car pulling up beside me. There was a rifle barrel sticking out of the back window, so I hit my brakes and tried to stay out of the line of fire. They backed up and started firing at me. I couldn't return the fire very well, but I did manage to wing one of them in the foot and flatten their

front tires. They took off, I started to go after them, and then I got this crease on my back from their farewell shot. My car wouldn't start, though, so they managed to get away."

One of the cops was jotting all this down in his notebook. The other one asked, "How about some descriptions?"

Shayne shook his head. "It all happened too fast. I never got a good look at the men, just the guns."

"What about their car?"

"Late model sedan, didn't catch the make. Dark blue. Florida plates, but I never got a chance to read them. I know it's not a hell of a lot to go on."

The cop who was writing snorted and said, "It's damn near nothing. But we'll call it in, Shayne."

Shayne was beginning to feel pretty foolish, standing there in the middle of a crowd of gaping onlookers, nude and bloody from the waist up. He said, "I suppose you want me to stick around."

The cop closed his notebook. "Not necessary. We've got your story, we know who you are and where to find you if we want to. No, as far as we're concerned, you can beat it."

They must have seen Shayne's look of surprise, because the other one said, "We've got no bone to pick with you, Shayne. It looks to us like you were the victim here. Of course, the chief might not see it that way, but he's not here, so . . ."

Shayne grinned. "Thanks, fellas. If you catch any flak over this, just send it on to me."

As the cops returned to their cruiser, the nurse said to Shayne, "You should really have a doctor look at that. It's only a crease, like you said, but it should be disinfected and bandaged."

"I'll take care of it. Thanks."

She went on her way, muttering about how stubborn men could be, and the rest of the crowd dissipated as well. Shayne slipped his shirt back on, tossed his coat in the back seat, and went in search of a telephone.

He found one in front of a drugstore, called a wrecker for the Buick and a taxi for himself.

THE NEXT HOUR WAS SPENT getting the Buick to a garage and himself back to his apartment hotel on Second Avenue. The hotel doctor visited his apartment, cleaned the wound and taped it up, and told Shayne that he was going to have some sore muscles in his back.

Shayne's next move was to call a car rental agency and arrange to have a car delivered to the hotel. He would have rather waited for the Buick to be fixed, but the demands of the case didn't allow for leisure like that.

He dialed the office number next and smiled when he heard Lucy's soft voice say, "Michael Shayne's office."

"It's me, Angel. I just wanted to let you know what's going on."

"I was wondering about that, Michael. I hadn't heard from you since you left with Andy. Have you settled things for him?"

Shayne chuckled. "I think you're overestimating me. But I have done some looking into the case. I talked to his father and to the woman who tutors him, and they don't think there's anything to the nightmares. Then I went to see Leland Spencer and told him about it."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't, not really. He thought the dreams might be just a reaction to Andy's circumstances, but he also said that they might have a basis in reality."

"Then Andy might have really seen something like what he described?"

"It's possible. Spencer said that he could put the boy under hypnosis and maybe get at the truth that way."

"Is that what you're going to do next?"

"That's what I was on my way to do when somebody started shooting at me."

"Shooting at you? *Michael!* Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Shayne grunted, lighting a cigarette. "But the Buick is in the shop for some major engine and body work. It should take them about a week."

There was a short stretch of silence from Lucy, then she said slowly, "Michael, you don't have any other cases right now."

"I know. I already thought of that."

"That means whoever shot at you . . . might have done it because you're trying to help Andy."

"Yeah," Shayne said flatly. "That occurred to me, too."

"And they could also be after . . . him."

"I'm on my way out there now," Shayne said. "I've got a feeling that something is very wrong in that house."

V.

SEVERAL HOURS HAD PASSED SINCE SHAYNE LEFT the Fenton-house. It was a little after four o'clock when he pulled up in front of

the house again, driving the rental job, a tan Chevrolet. He felt considerably better now that he had his wound tended to, changed into fresh clothes, and savored a tall tumbler of Cognac. Now he was ready to get back to work again.

Ready and anxious. The sooner he got Andy into Leland Spencer's care and under hypnosis, the sooner they might get to the bottom of a situation that had turned unexpectedly dangerous.

One thing in particular had been puzzling Shayne about the attempt on his life, something he hadn't mentioned to the cops. The rifle had been fired from the rear window at first, and Shayne had a fairly good view of the other car for a second.

And he hadn't seen anyone behind the barrel of the rifle.

That didn't make sense; there had to have been someone firing the rifle. Shayne hadn't been able to figure out yet how they had worked it, but he was sure there had been some trick to it.

He put the question out of his head for the moment as he got out of the Chevrolet and strode up the front door of the Fenton house. He pressed the bell with a blunt finger, put his hands in his pockets, and waited for an answer.

No one came to the door, so after a moment, Shayne walked toward the end of the house. He strolled around the corner and along the side of the house, into the back yard. A station wagon and a small foreign sedan were in the garage, leaving an empty space for one more car. It could be that Andy, Fenton, and Anne Marshall had all gone somewhere, Shayne speculated. So far he had seen no sign of life around the house.

The large back yard, with its flower beds and neat rows of trees, drew his steps in that direction. He turned in a circle, still seeing no one, and then called out, "Anybody home?" There was no answer.

Shayne's eyes went back to the tall palm trees. He frowned. There was something there, something that seemed out of place . . . He started to walk in that direction.

A heavy hand fell on his shoulders and spun him around.

An angry face shoved up into his and demanded, "What the hell you doin' here, buster?"

Shayne jerked his shoulder loose from the man's strong grip, feeling a slight twinge in his back as he did so. He snapped, "I could ask you the same question. Where's Mr. Fenton?"

"He had to go out. And Goddammit, I work here! Now you better tell me who you are and what you want, PDQ!"

The man was big, an inch or so taller than Shayne, with the broad, heavy shoulders and sunburned skin of a man who worked outdoors

most of the time. His dark hair fell over his forehead. His hands clenched into fists.

"Take it easy," Shayne said. "My name is Mike Shayne. I'm looking for Andy Fenton."

"Shayne, eh?" the man rumbled. "They told me about you. That was a cheap trick, getting that poor kid to hire you."

Shayne kept a tight rein on his temper. "It was Andy's idea to hire me," he said, "and I gave the money back to his father. Now, I'm just trying to help the boy."

The man's face twisted in a sneer. "Sure, you are. It's just a coincidence that Mr. Fenton's rich, ain't it?"

Shayne took a deep breath. "You said you work here?"

"That's right. I'm the gardener, as well as taking care of the cars. What's it to you?"

Shayne returned the man's belligerent glare and said, "I don't think I owe you any explanations, then. My business is with Andy. Is he here?"

The man hunched his shoulders. "I'm not telling you a damn thing, you —"

"Barry!"

The new voice came from Anne Marshall, who came hurrying from the rear of the house. She said, "Mr. Shayne, what are you doing here?" To the other man, she said, "It's all right, Barry, I'll handle this."

The big man said grudgingly, "Okay, Miss Marshall, whatever you say," and turned away with a glower.

As he stalked off, Anne Marshall turned back to Shayne and said, "I'm sorry if Barry gave you any trouble, Mr. Shayne. He's very loyal to the family, very protective of Andy. You'll have to excuse him."

"Don't worry about it," Shayne said. "He didn't give me any trouble that I couldn't handle. I rang the bell, but I couldn't raise anybody in the house."

"I was upstairs, and it took me a few moments to come down. Did you come to see Andy again? I must say, you made quite an impression on him. He's done nothing but talk about you all afternoon."

Shayne grinned. "I like the little guy, too. And I may have come up with a way to help him."

"Oh?" Shayne couldn't be sure of it, but he thought he saw a flicker of something pass through Anne's eyes. "What's that?"

"Hypnosis."

Anne looked surprised. "You must be joking! You're going to hypnotize a little boy just because he has a few bad dreams?"

"I'm not, but a friend of mine is. He's a psychologist, and he thinks there may be something to the dreams."

Anne shook her head. "I just don't know . . ."

"What's wrong with the idea?" Shayne wanted to know.

"I didn't say there was anything wrong with it," Anne replied. "I'm just not sure I want to take the responsibility for letting you do such a thing."

"Where's Fenton?"

"Mr. Fenton had a business appointment in Miami."

"What kind of business is he in?"

"Investment counseling."

Shayne glanced around at the luxurious estate. "He must be damn good at it."

"He is." Anne smiled slightly. "He seems to have an almost magic touch with money."

"Must be a nice thing to have," Shayne grunted. "Now, where's Andy?"

Anne hesitated for a moment, then a look of resolve came onto her face. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but I can't allow you to take Andy and go through with this crazy idea, not without Mr. Fenton's permission."

Shayne scowled. "When will Fenton be back?"

"This evening some time. He was going to have dinner with his client."

Shayne made up his mind abruptly. Considering the attempt on his life, waiting might well be dangerous. Dangerous for Andy, because someone might want to kill him, and dangerous for Shayne, because someone had *already* tried to take him out of the picture for good and might try again. The most important thing now was to find out what was behind it all; Shayne knew quite well that one of the riskiest things in his line of work was lack of information.

"I'm sorry, too," he said, "but I didn't ask your permission. I think it'll be better all around if I just go get Andy and get on with it."

Anne's voice was sharper. "I told you that you can't do that!"

Shayne didn't say anymore. He turned and walked into the house, leaving Anne staring after him.

He stopped in the central hall and raised his voice. "Hey, Andy! Where are you?"

"Mike? Is that you?" Andy's voice came from a staircase down the hall, and as Shayne strode toward it, he saw Andy appear on the second floor landing. The boy hurried on down the stairs to meet him.

"Hi, Andy," Shayne said. "Would you like to go see a guy with me and maybe clear up this business about your nightmares?"

"You know I would!" Andy exclaimed. "Have you got it figured out already? I knew you were a good detective!"

"Now wait a minute." Shayne held up a hand to stop the flow of enthusiastic words. "I didn't say I've got it all figured out. But maybe with the help of a friend of mine, we can all work together and figure out why you've been having the dreams."

A sudden look of suspicion came into Andy's eyes. "Who is this friend of yours?"

"His name is Dr. Spencer. He's a —"

"I bet I know what he is!" Andy cried. "I bet he's a shrink! You've decided I'm crazy, too!"

"Dammit," Shayne growled, "cut that out! I don't think you're the least bit crazy, no matter what's causing your dreams, and Dr. Spencer won't, either."

"Then why do you want me to see him?"

"So that he can hypnotize you. That way, we can maybe get into the part of your brain that normally we can't, and see just what it is that's giving you trouble."

Andy still looked dubious, but the prospect of being hypnotized obviously held some intrigue and appeal for him. He said, "It wouldn't hurt, would it?"

"I don't think so. I don't see how it could."

Andy nodded. "All right. As long as you don't think I'm crazy, I'll go with you. I get enough of the other from my father and Miss Marshall, though."

Shayne slapped the boy's shoulder lightly and said, "Let's go. You don't mind going right now, do you?"

Andy shook his head. "If I don't go with you, I'll have to read a chapter in my geography book."

Shayne grinned and walked toward the front door with Andy beside him. He swung the door open, stepped out, and stopped.

Barry, the burly gardener and mechanic, was leaning on the fender of the Chevrolet, brawny arms crossed and an ugly grin on his face.

"Just hold on there, Shayne," he said. "You're not taking that kid anywhere."

Shayne took a step toward the car and said in a low voice, "Don't push it. Just get out of the way."

Barry shook his head insolently. "No way. You got to go over me."

Anne Marshall's voice came from the front door behind them. "Please, Mr. Shayne. I don't want any trouble. But I told you, I can't let you take Andy like that. Can't it wait until you've talked it over with Mr. Fenton?"

Her request and her concern weren't unreasonable, Shayne knew, and maybe it could wait. But that knowledge didn't do anything to blunt the sense of urgency that had come over him. He couldn't shake the feeling that Andy was in danger as long as the cause of the dreams was unresolved, and the sooner things were cleared up, the better.

Besides, he didn't like the arrogant look on Barry's face, didn't like it one little bit.

Andy was looking from Shayne to Barry to Anne and back to Shayne again. It must have seemed to him like he was the object of a tug of war between the three adults, and it was clear from the look in his eyes that he was hoping Shayne would win.

"Come on, Andy," Shayne said. "We've got things to do."

He stepped toward the car again. Barry straightened up from his nonchalant pose and dropped his arms. The smile fell off his face, too, and his hands again formed fists. Anne said quietly, "Please, Mr. Shayne. *Don't.*"

Shayne reached for the car door.

Barry swung, a long, looping punch that Shayne saw coming a mile away.

As Anne let out a small cry, Shayne slipped his head under the blow and stepped closer to Barry. He brought his right up, hooking it to the man's stomach. Barry gasped.

Andy darted back quickly, getting out of the way. Anne ran to him and put her hands on his shoulders, but he shrugged them off distractedly, his eyes on the two big men beside the car.

Shayne blocked a punch with his forearm and sent a jab spearing into Barry's face. It rocked the gardener's head back, glazing his eyes for a moment; then he shook the cobwebs away and lunged at Shayne.

He was faster than he looked, as Shayne found out a second later. Barry's arms wrapped him and began to squeeze, pushing the air out of his lungs and sending waves of pain radiating out from the bullet crease in Shayne's back.

Shayne grunted and slammed a fist into the side of Barry's head, following it up with hard, open-handed slaps on both ears. The combination stunned Barry enough that his grip loosened slightly, and that was all Shayne needed.

Twisting out of Barry's arms, Shayne launched a left that crashed into the man's jaw and followed it a split-second later with a right to the same place. As Anne and Andy watched with wide eyes, Barry wavered on his feet for a moment, then slowly folded up into a heap on the asphalt driveway.

Shayne rubbed knuckles that were going to be sore and bruised and

tried to catch his breath. Andy stared at him almost reverently and said, "Wow. I didn't think anybody was stronger than Barry."

"It's not always a matter of strength," Shayne said quietly. "It's what you do with it. Let's go, Andy." He opened the car door. "Unless you have some more objections, Miss Marshall?"

Anne shook her head. She appeared stunned by the violence. "No, Mr. Shayne. I still wish you wouldn't, but . . ."

Shayne got Andy into the car and then pulled away from the house, seeing in the rear view mirror the way Anne bent over Barry, trying to revive him. He glanced over at Andy.

The boy was still watching him with that wide-eyed look. It was a clear case of hero worship, increased probably by the fight.

And Shayne wasn't sure he liked that at all.

VI

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER, ANDY WAS RECLINED on a comfortable sofa in Leland Spencer's office. The psychologist was sitting in a chair beside him, talking softly, while Shayne leaned against the desk across the room. Andy's eyes were closed and his breathing regular.

"All right, Andy," Spencer said quietly, "I want you to tell me about your dream."

This was the first time Shayne had seen anyone hypnotized, and the process had surprised him. There were no magic words, no mumbo-jumbo of any sort, just the calm, intense voice of Dr. Spencer.

"I'm standing in a field," Andy answered without opening his eyes. "The sun's hot. I'm not really lost, but . . . I don't know where I am. I wish I could go home. There . . . there doesn't seem to be anything around the field. I don't know where I am."

Shayne leaned forward and frowned. The boy was still blocking out some of the surroundings of the dream. He wondered what that meant. Spencer said soothingly, "Go on, Andy."

"I want to go home, so I start walking, but I don't know if I'm going in the right direction or not." The rate of Andy's breathing increased, and his face became slightly flushed. "There's trees at the end of the field, big trees. It's dark underneath them. I-I'm scared to go there, but I don't want to stay in the field. I go into the trees. There are a lot of bushes . . . My shirt gets caught on one of them and rips. I hope I don't get in trouble."

Andy paused. Shayne and Spencer remained silent, giving him time to cope with whatever was going on inside his head. After a moment,

Andy swallowed and went on, "There's hills, with woods on them, lots of trees and bushes. I'm getting awfully tired, and I wish I could find my way back. I just know I'm going to get in trouble."

Andy swallowed again, and his shoulders moved slightly as a tremor of agitation passed through him. He said, "I heard voices. Maybe it's somebody who can help me. I'll find them. I go in that direction. I-I see somebody through the trees, down at the bottom of the hill."

"What do they look like?" Spencer asked as Andy hesitated again.

"They're . . . funny-looking. There's two of them. One is tall, real tall, and real skinny. I'll bet he's eight feet tall. But the other one's little, just a few feet high. I never saw people like them before. They make me feel funny . . . scared, almost. The skinny man has a shovel, and he's digging a hole in the ground. There's something down there with them, something long and wrapped up in canvas, it looks like. It has ropes around it, and the little man is checking them, making sure they're tight, I guess. The more I look at them, the more I think I shouldn't be there. They won't help me get home. But I can't stop myself from watching them."

"The skinny man is through with the hole. He puts his shovel down and grabs the thing in the canvas. The little man gets the other end of it. He can't carry as much, he's not big enough, but they get it over to the hole. Then the skinny man rolls it in. The little man hops up and down. They start to throw the dirt back in . . ."

"Then I must have stepped on a twig or something, because the little man looks straight up the hill at me. He looks surprised and grabs the skinny man's legs and points at me. They both look mad, and they start coming up the hill."

"That really does scare me, so I start to run. I go back the way I came, through the trees and I can hear them coming behind me. I'm so scared I've got this fluttery kind of hurt in my stomach, and I don't dare look back over my shoulder to see how close they are. I just run as hard as I can. A few minutes later, I come out of the trees and back into the field. I run straight across it, and now I can see that there's a little road on the other side of it. I run down that road."

"My side starts to hurt, and in a little bit I have to slow down. Then I look back anyway, even though I'm still real scared. But there's nobody behind me now. I stop running, but I keep walking, and pretty soon I'm back with my dad."

"Back where?" Spencer asked. "Where is your father?"

"I-I'm not sure. There are trees again, and our station wagon . . . A tent! There's a tent there."

Shayne stood up and started to say something, but Spencer mo-

tioned him back. "What happened then?" the psychologist asked.

"I got in trouble for tearing my shirt, just like I thought I would," Andy said. "My dad yelled at me. I knew I better not tell him about the skinny man and the little man, or he might yell at me about them, too. We went home then."

"All right, Andy," Spencer said. "You can rest again now. You're still asleep, and you will sleep until I tell you to wake up. When I tell you to, you'll wake up and feel much better. Understand? Now, you rest again."

Andy's breathing became regular again as Spencer swung around to face Shayne. The psychologist heaved a long sigh.

"Can he hear us?" Shayne asked.

"No, he's sound asleep, and he'll stay that way until I give him the command to wake up. Mike . . . that was no dream that boy described. It started out that way, when he couldn't see anything but that field he was in, but as the boundaries were pushed back, he got into describing more than just what he sees in his nightmare. He was reliving the incident that prompted the nightmares."

"He couldn't be making it up, imagining it?"

Spencer shook his head. "If he is, then he's got himself utterly convinced of it. But I don't feel that's the case. I think he actually saw what he says he saw."

"But what about those descriptions, for God's sake? A guy eight feet tall and one three feet tall?" Shayne grimaced and tugged at his earlobe.

Spencer shrugged his shoulders. "I won't pretend to know the answer to that one," he said. "It does seem impossible, and I can't explain it. My definite impression, though, is that Andy is telling the truth."

Still scowling, Shayne stalked across the room and lit a cigarette as he looked out the window. "Some of it does make sense," he said, almost to himself. "It sounds to me like Andy and his father were on some sort of camping trip. Andy wandered off, saw . . . something . . . and ran back to their camp. He was afraid to tell his father about it, and he blocked the whole incident out of his mind. Until it started popping back up in his dreams."

Spencer nodded. "That's a good analysis. I read the situation the same way."

Shayne's gray eyes were squinting as he looked out the window, but he wasn't seeing downtown Miami or Biscayne Bay beyond. He was seeing a wooded, hilly area, and a young boy who was running through it, terror lending wings to his feet. "What I have to do now," Shayne

said slowly, "is find out where that camping trip was. Maybe I can locate the place where Andy saw them burying something. I've got a feeling he was right when he came to my office. He saw somebody disposing of a body, that somebody saw him, and they don't want him or me snooping around about it."

"Won't it be kind of dangerous for you to try to find the grave?" Spencer asked.

"I'd rather it be me in danger than that little guy there. I'm used to it. I guess you'd better wake him up now. I've got a few questions to ask him."

Spencer turned back to Andy and said, "All right, Andy, you can hear me again. The next time I say your name, you'll wake up, rested and refreshed, and you won't remember what you told us. You understand? Andy."

The boy's eyes opened immediately. He took a deep breath and said, "When are you going to start?"

Spencer grinned and said, "That's what they all say."

"You mean you've already done it?"

"That's right. You were an excellent subject."

Andy shook his head slowly. "Wow. I never would have known. Hey, what did you find out?"

"I'd like to ask you a few questions first, Andy," Shayne said. "Then we'll tell you about it."

"Well, okay."

"Have you and your father ever been on a camping trip?"

"Sure. When I was little and my mom still lived with us, we went a lot. Then . . . I guess the two of them didn't like to be around each other as much as before, because we stopped going. Until . . . until not long after my mom left. Then my father and I went on one. He . . . said it was to get my mind off things."

Shayne leaned forward and asked, "Do you remember tearing your shirt?"

"Yeah, my dad got kind of mad at me about it. That was the day we came home."

"What else do you remember about that day?"

Andy shrugged. "Not much. Why?"

Shayne ignored the question for the moment and asked another of his own. "Could you tell me where you were camped?"

"It was a place that a friend of my dad's owns; it has a little lake on it where we did some fishing. I think it's over close to Sarasota. I know it's a long drive over there."

"Thanks, Andy. I can probably find it."

"Why do you want to know? Are you going over there?"

Shayne sent a questioning glance at Spencer, and the psychologist nodded. Shayne said, "I'm going over there to look for the place where your dream takes place. You told us about it while you were under, Andy, and you remembered a lot more about it. You described the burial that you witnessed, and you told us about the camping trip. I want to find that grave."

Andy's eyes had widened as Shayne spoke. He said, "You mean it was really all true, like I thought? That means I'm not crazy!"

"No," Spencer said, "you're not crazy, Andy, although that's not the word we usually use. You saw something that upset you so much, your mind sort of threw a circuit breaker. You didn't remember it. But the memory of it started coming out in your dreams."

Andy looked at Shayne solemnly. "I saw someone burying a body, didn't I? And they saw me. They won't like it when they find out I told about it."

Shayne didn't want to tell him that it looked like the gravediggers might already know their secret was out. If they did, that would explain the attempt on Shayne's life.

"You'll be safe enough at your house," Shayne assured him. "People with a secret to keep don't want to draw attention to themselves. All we have to do is be careful, and nothing will happen to you."

Andy smiled, and Shayne saw that look in his eyes again. "I know nothing will happen, Mike. You'll take care of it, won't you?"

"Yeah, Andy," Shayne said, his voice grim. "I'll take care of it."

Shayne thanked Spencer for his help, promising to keep him up to date on what was happening with the case, then said, "I guess I'd better get you home, Andy. That tutor of yours is liable to have kittens if I keep you out too long."

Andy grinned. "I guess Miss Marshall is just worried about me. She's a nice lady."

EVENING WAS STARTING TO FALL IN THE CITY as Shayne and Andy crossed the Bay in the rented Chevrolet. The boy was fairly quiet, watching the emerging lights of the Beach, as Shayne turned things over in his mind. It seemed to him the only way to insure Andy's safety in the long run was to clear this mess up and nab whoever had been disposing of a body that day several months earlier. Shayne was convinced now that it was a body, and the secrecy meant only one thing to him.

Murder.

That was the only explanation that made sense, and it meant that the boy was in danger as long as the killers were loose. He thought he could take the heat off Andy though, by putting his own head on the chopping block. He hoped a trip across the state, an expedition to discover the secret grave, would flush out the culprits.

Most of the lights in the Fenton house were on when Shayne pulled up in front of it. Before they could even get out of the car, Henry Fenton had come stalking out of the house, Anne Marshall right behind him. Fenton's features were set in lines of anger.

As Shayne stepped out of the Chevrolet, Fenton barked, "Shayne! What do you mean by taking my son without permission?"

Shayne gestured at Andy, who was coming around the front of the car now. "You can see I brought him back in one piece."

"You had no right to take him in the first place. You're not his father!"

Shayne scowled. "Maybe not, but *I'm* interested in helping him. Are you?"

"Why — why, of course I am!" Fenton sputtered.

"Then you might try listening to him every once in a while," Shayne snapped. "If you did, you might realize that he's in danger."

"Danger? What are you talking about?"

"I mean I think he was a witness to the aftermath of a murder," Shayne said bluntly.

"A murder?" Anne Marshall exclaimed.

Fenton echoed her surprise. "That's nonsense! The boy had a few bad dreams, that's all."

"They were more than bad dreams, Dad. Mike proved that."

Fenton shot a glance at Shayne at Andy's words. Shayne saw the hostility in the man's eyes and knew that there wouldn't be any use arguing with the man, at least not until he had some facts to back up his speculations. He said, "Listen, Fenton, just keep an eye on Andy here. He should be safe enough, but a little caution might help. I'm going to get to the bottom of this, you can count on that."

He turned to Andy, clapped him on the shoulder, and said, "See you later, kid." He got into the car, Anne Marshall came over to Andy and stood with her hands on his shoulders. Fenton just stood there, glaring at him in the dusk, and all three of them watched as he drove away.

As he turned back out onto the street, Shayne lit a cigarette, moved slightly so as to ease the strain on his bullet-creased back, and rubbed his jaw wearily. The day had turned into a tiring one. There had been an attempt on his life, the run-in with Barry, the gardener, and the strain of dealing with an emotion-charged situation. Coping with kids

and their problems wasn't usually in his line of work.

But murder was. And murder was at the bottom of this case, of that Shayne was convinced.

When he arrived back at his apartment, he called Lucy to tell her what he had discovered, and he wasn't surprised at her reaction.

"Oh, Michael, that poor child. You've got to help him."

"I'm planning on it," Shayne said. "I'm going to drive over in the morning and try to find the place where he saw the burial. If I can turn up the killers, that'll take him out of danger. His nightmares should stop, too, but if they don't, a few more sessions with Leland Spencer should take care of that."

"You're doing it again, aren't you, Michael?"

A grin creased his rugged face. "Doing what, Angel?"

"You know. Putting yourself on the spot. You hope that by poking around, you can draw the killers out into the open."

"It works sometimes."

"Yes, and you've already been wounded once today. You be careful, Michael."

"Will do, Angel," he chuckled. "I'll let you know when I get back tomorrow. As for tonight, I think I'll fix myself some supper and hit the sack a little early."

He hung up after saying good night and headed for the small kitchen of the apartment. There was hamburger meat in the refrigerator, and he planned on fixing it the way he liked it, thick and rare.

The telephone rang before he got there.

Turning back, Shayne scooped the receiver up and said, "Hello."

"Is this Mike Shayne?" It was a woman's voice, muffled and urgent.

"That's right," Shayne said. "Who's this?"

"I heard that you were . . . that you're trying to help my son."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the phone. "Mrs. Fenton?"

"I was so worried that he would take it wrong when I left . . ." The woman was almost whispering. Shayne could hear the anxiety in her voice.

"Where are you?" he asked. "Are you here in Miami?"

"I-I can't tell you that. You see —"

Glass shattered, and something whipped by Shayne's ear.

He dropped the phone and dove for the floor. There was another whine, like a giant mosquito, and Shayne saw plaster fly from the wall. One of the window panes was gone, turned into shards of glass on the carpet by the first bullet.

Shayne rolled across the room, ignoring the pain in his back. He

was wearing his shoulder rig now, and he jerked the gun out of its holster as he rolled. A third slug ripped the air above him.

He reached the wall, surged to his feet, and slapped at the light switch as he felt a tugging at his sleeve. Darkness fell on the apartment, and he hurried toward the broken window in a crouch.

Shayne saw the flash of the next shot, across the street diagonally, in a small park on the banks of the Miami River. His apartment was on the second floor, and the angle was enough to make shooting difficult. That meant the gunman knew what he was doing. He had already come close to scoring a couple of times.

Shayne snapped two shots at the place where he had seen the muzzle flash. He saw a flicker of movement in the shadows, heard the slam of a car door, and then the vehicle was racing away, lights out. He saw the flare of its brake lights as it swung around a corner, and then it was gone. There was no way he could catch up with it.

Holstering his pistol and muttering curses under his breath, Shayne felt his way across the darkened room and flipped the lights on again. He stooped and picked up the telephone from where he had dropped it on the floor. He barked, "Mrs. Fenton, are you still there? Mrs. Fenton? Mrs. Fenton!"

There was no answer. The phone on the other end was dead.

VII

THE NEXT MORNING FOUND SHAYNE ON THE ROAD, following a wide highway west across the Sunshine State. Andy's directions had been a little vague, but he had been able to tell Shayne how to get to the general area of the camping trip, and had also told him the name of the man who owned the land, a business associate of Henry Fenton's named Lloyd Embry. Shayne thought he could find the place. At least he hoped so. Finding the grave was the first step toward a successful conclusion of this case.

The doctor had been right. Shayne's back was stiff and sore around the wound, but it was loosening up as the day went along. The slight irritation of it wasn't bothering him nearly as much as the thoughts nagging his brain.

Two attempts in one day was proof enough for anybody. Someone didn't want him investigating this case and was willing to kill to keep it that way. He was more convinced than ever that the burial Andy had witnessed was real, that it was evidence of a murder. But there was something else that was bothering him, something that he couldn't pin down, as if he had seen it and then forgotten it.

And now there was the mysterious phone call from Mrs. Fenton to worry about as well. He wondered if it was coincidence that the second attempt on his life had come just as he was talking to her on the phone . . . ?

The traffic was fairly light on the highway this morning. Shayne skirted the Everglades and continued northwest, turning the angles of the case over in his head as he drove. The only answers he came up with still pointed him toward Sarasota and the concealed grave.

It was nearly noon when Shayne pulled off the highway and stopped at a small roadside cafe. The place was fairly busy, the lunch rush just beginning, but he had no trouble finding a place to sit at the counter. A stocky waitress with a pretty face came over to him.

"Hello," Shayne nodded. "Let me have a cup of coffee and the thickest steak you've got, with plenty of potatoes."

"Will do," she said, relaying the order to the kitchen. "You're not from around here, are you?"

"No, just passing through. I'm looking for some property that's supposed to be around here somewhere, belongs to a man named Embry. Would you happen to know where it is?"

"Sure do." She smiled at him, obviously taken by his brawny face and ruggedly attractive features. "Mr. Embry owns a few hundred acres just north of here. He and his friends from Miami come over to hunt and fish a lot. They usually stop in here when they do."

"You might know the Fentons, then, Henry Fenton and his little boy." Shayne knew very well that places like this cafe, situated as it was in a largely rural area, were good areas to pick up information. Waitresses heard it all, and usually remembered it.

This one said, "Shoot, yeah, I remember Mr. Fenton and his boy. I heard that Mrs. Fenton left 'em. Is that right?"

Shayne nodded and sipped at the coffee she had poured for him. "That's what I hear."

"Darn shame. That's a cute little boy. He never talked much, but he seemed sweet."

Shayne's order arrived from the kitchen then, and she placed it in front of him and then went back down the counter to wait on more new customers. The steak was good, pleasantly surprising Shayne. He enjoyed the meal, and when he was finished, beckoned the waitress over again.

"How exactly do I get to the Embry place?" he asked.

"You just follow this hot-top road next to the cafe here for about two miles, then turn right on a dirt road. Everything to your left for the next mile or so belongs to Mr. Embry."

"Thanks," Shayne said, putting enough bills on the counter to cover the check and a healthy tip. The waitress smiled prettily at him again.

Shayne lit a cigarette as he started the rented Chevrolet and pulled away from the little eatery. The road he followed led through well-tended farm land, past neat white frame houses that had probably been there for several decades. This was peaceful country, not the sort of place at all that looked like it would conceal a murder. Shayne knew, though, that no place was immune to violence, that it could infect anywhere with its ugliness.

HE FOUND THE DIRT ROAD the waitress had told him about. As he turned onto it, he saw the fence that bordered the road. There was no sign on it declaring the land to be private property. Shayne saw a gate farther down the road.

He stopped the car in front of the gate and saw that it was locked. A smaller dirt lane led away from it, winding through a field until it disappeared into a grove of trees. Shayne could see the sun shining on water off to the right and knew that must be the lake he had been told about. From what he could see of the landscape, this was a pretty place, and it certainly matched Andy's description with its trees and hills and fields.

The gate was easy to climb. Shayne was over it in a moment, his sore back twinging only a little bit, and then he strode down the dirt lane rapidly. There was no telling where on the property the grave was located, and if it covered several hundred acres as the waitress had said, then he had a good-sized hunt in front of him. The sun was warm overhead, and Shayne felt sweat break out on his forehead.

He crossed the field and went into the trees, going up a small hill that gave him a better view of the small private lake. The property appeared to be deserted, and this far off the highway, the sounds of civilization had all but faded away. Shayne could hear the songs of the birds that flitted in the treetops over his head and the rustle of small animals as they scurried away from him in the brush. They were sounds he didn't hear often back in the urban wilderness of Miami, and they were pleasant to the ear.

He left the lane and cut across a field, ankle-deep in lush grass. There were woods on the other side, like in Andy's dream, and Shayne felt a slight prickling on the back of his neck as he entered them. This might not be the place, but it just as easily could be.

There was little undergrowth beneath the trees, and he made his way through them quickly. The ground beneath his feet sloped up into a hill again, and when he reached the top of it, he paused again. The

trees thinned out on the other side of the hill, and there was a small clearing at the bottom of it. Again, it matched Andy's description. Shayne's eyes searched the clearing, but he saw nothing out of the ordinary, just more grass. Of course, four months had passed since Andy had been here, if this was even the place. That was time enough for the grass to grow back. It would take a closer look to determine anything for sure. Shayne started down the hill.

He reached the clearing rapidly and then knelt to study the ground, pushing the grass aside with a hand. As he studied the place, his brows came together in a frown. He was no Leatherstocking, but it looked like the grass was thinner here, as if it was just moving back in.

As if the ground had been dug up and then replaced . . .

There was a shovel in the trunk of his car. Shayne stood up, grimaced, and turned to go get it. It was time to do some digging.

He had taken two steps when the gun went off.

He heard the crack of the gun and the whine of the bullet zipping past his head almost simultaneously. Acting purely on instinct, he left his feet in a rolling dive, grabbing at his pistol in its shoulder holster.

Another bullet smacked into the ground beside him as he hit. He rolled frantically, looking for some cover. There was a tree about twenty feet away . . .

The gun cracked again, more bullets plowing furrows in the ground. Surging to his feet, Shayne lunged toward the tree. He left his feet again when he got near it, sprawling on the ground and rolling until the trunk of the tree was between him and the sniper.

Shayne had gotten a glimpse of a muzzle flare as he ran, and now with the sound of the shots, he could pin down the approximate location of the gunman. He poked the nose of his pistol around the trunk of the tree and squeezed off three quick shots. He couldn't see if any of them hit home, but at least the gunman stopped firing for a moment.

Shayne lay stretched out on the ground, his pulse pounding, sending adrenaline coursing through his veins. Long seconds crept by, and there was silence in the woods. The birds had taken off at the first shots, as had the smaller animals. Shayne eased his head to one side, just enough to see past the tree. There was nothing and no one in sight, and the glade looked as peaceful as ever. Shayne didn't believe the illusion for a second.

He felt a sudden sting of fiery pain on his wrist and looked down to see a large red ant crawling on him. Slapping it off, he cursed mentally. He could see now that he had picked a large ant bed to seek cover on.

They were all over him now, and all of his instincts told him to roll off of them and start slapping the little bastards. He controlled the urge with an iron will. If the sniper was still up there on the hill, such a move might prove fatal.

He couldn't lay there and keep getting stung, though. His body was covered with the little spots of fire now, and he didn't know how long he could stand it.

His hat had come off during his last roll behind the tree, but it was lying on the ground beside him. He grabbed it and flipped it out away from the tree to the right, rolling to the left as he did so. He heard the gun crack again, and the hat jerked in the air.

Shayne was on the other side of the tree, though, and he was pulling the trigger of his pistol while the other gunshot was still echoing in the air. He fired three more times and was rewarded with a sharp cry of pain. Then he was on his feet and running in a zigzag pattern toward another stand of trees.

As he paused behind them to reload, he heard the sound of someone crashing through the undergrowth, moving away from him. He moved shells into the cylinder, snapped it shut, and then looked out from his place of concealment in the trees. The sounds of the attacker fleeing were diminishing.

Shayne took off after him, plowing through the brush, heedless of the small cuts and scratches that it gave him. As he ran, he slapped the remaining ants off his body, venting some of his anger on the gnawing insects.

He topped the hill and plunged down the other side of it, and as he emerged from the trees, he caught a glimpse of a figure disappearing into the woods across the field. Shayne sprinted after him.

They were headed in the direction of the road, and Shayne didn't want the gunman reaching his car before he did. The man might try to disable it — if he hadn't already — and strand him out here, where he could be hunted down at their leisure.

Shayne put everything he had into his sprint across the field. He was out in the open here, and he wanted to reach the trees as fast as he could. His long legs flashed as they carried him with surprising speed across the field.

He had to slow down when he reached the woods, in order to keep from dashing his brains out on a tree limb. He had lost sight of his quarry, and he hurried through the woods as fast as he could. A moment later he reached the other side of the band of trees and paused before going into the open again.

The dirt lane was back in sight now, and further on, he could see his

car, parked on the other side of the fence. There didn't seem to be anyone around it, but that could be a trap, Shayne knew. He waited in the shadows for several long moments before venturing cautiously out into the field.

Nobody shot at him. He let out the breath he had been holding and hurried across to the dirt lane, then trotted down it to the gate. He would be in an awkward, defenseless position as he climbed over it, but there was no other way to get back to the car.

He studied the vehicle for a second before starting over. There was no one in it that he could see, so he holstered his gun, grabbed the top rail of the gate, and started to swing himself over.

It took him only a few seconds to reach the other side, and when he dropped to the dirt of the road, he strode rapidly to the car, grabbed the handle of the front door, and jerked it open.

The gun went off in his face.

The roar of it deafened him, and he felt powder sting his face. But the slug missed him by a fraction of an inch, and that was all that mattered. There wasn't time to go for his own gun. His hand shot out, fingers clamping down on the barrel of the just fired pistol, and pulled.

The hand holding the butt of the gun looked awfully small as Shayne pulled it toward him . . .

Something slammed into the back of his head.

He fell forward, his brain exploding into a brilliant fireworks show, but his fighting instincts kept him going. His foot lashed out behind him and smashed into something or someone. There was a cry of pain. Shayne felt someone grabbing at his head, and he wrapped his arms around the assailant, spinning and throwing the man away. The car was empty now, and he had a second's respite while his attackers regrouped. The key was still in the ignition, and Shayne hit it as he slumped into the front seat.

The engine caught, and with the door still open, Shayne threw the gear shift lever over and sent the car spinning backwards. He heard yells as the two men outside leaped to get out of the way. Gunfire rattled, and slugs hit the body of the car. Shayne spun the wheel, turning it, hitting the fence, and then getting it pointed in the right direction. He shifted again, and his foot came down heavily on the accelerator. He thought for a second that the engine was going to stall, but then it came up with a roar and sent the car rocketing down the dirt road. Shayne didn't pay any attention to the shots that followed him.

Under other circumstances, he would have tried to nab the man who had attacked him. But the blow on the head had nearly knocked him

out, and he was operating on the edge of unconsciousness. If he had stayed and continued to fight, the outcome would have been inevitable. And unpleasant. . .

As he drove, Shayne's head began to clear. By the time he got back to the highway, he had a splitting headache, but he no longer felt like he would black out at any second. Adding to his discomfort were the ant bites, which were now swelling into painful red welts. Overall, he felt as bad as he had in a long time.

There was no time to worry about that, though. The attack of him was the final piece of proof he needed. Now he could bring in the authorities, show them the grave, and get them started tracking down the killers of whoever was buried there.

It wouldn't be long now until Andy Fenton had nothing to worry about except his schoolwork and his model rockets.

VIII

THE NEAREST TOWN WAS SARASOTA, some ten miles farther west, on the Gulf Coast. Shayne headed in that direction. The county sheriff would probably be the man to see. He would have the jurisdiction out here in the country.

The first thing Shayne saw as he entered the town was a large billboard proclaiming this to be SARASOTA — WINTER HOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST TRAVELING CIRCUSES. He stared at it for a moment, and then something clicked inside his aching head.

That was it. That was the explanation for the grotesque descriptions of the men in Andy's dream. What better place to find people who were out of the ordinary than in the circus?

Shayne slowed for a red light and pulled on his ear. That theory would answer a lot of questions. One of the men he was dealing with was a midget! That was why Shayne hadn't been able to see him behind the barrel of the rifle the day before, and that was why he hadn't seen the man lurking in his car a little earlier. He was after a midget and an elongated man.

A grin that had traces of savagery in it creased Shayne's face. He had been shot, hit in the head, eaten by ants . . . and suddenly he was in no mood to just turn everything over to the cops. He had too much of a personal stake in this, on both his account and Andy's as well.

The killers knew him, knew he was after them. He couldn't help but wonder what they would do if he showed up at the headquarters of the various circuses, asking questions and nosing around. They might react violently, as they had already done several times. And if they did,

he might be able to wrap the whole thing up in a pretty package to turn over to the authorities.

He stopped at a gas station to fill up the tank and ask the attendant, "Where would I find the circus people?"

"All over town," the man snorted. "This place is crawlin' with midgets and tattooed ladies and dog-faced boys and sword swallowers and foreigners. 'Taint like it used to be."

Shayne repressed his impatience with the man and asked again, "Where are their headquarters?"

"North side of town is where you'll find most of 'em. They got their own community over there. Some of 'em even put their tents up, but most of 'em stay in cottages they've got over there. They even got their lions and tigers and elephants with 'em. Lord, talk about noise! And the smell —"

Shayne surrendered a twenty dollar bill for the gas and cut off the man's tirade with a curt "Thanks." He pointed the car north, going around the main part of Sarasota, and soon found the circus area.

There were indeed tents up, giant structures of canvas that were gaudily-painted. Now that he thought about it, Shayne had heard about circuses wintering in Sarasota. The weather was such that the more tropical animals weren't adversely affected, and it made a good place for the troupes to rehearse for several months while waiting for the warm weather to return to the rest of the country.

There were also rows of small cottages and apartments where most of the performers lived. As Shayne drove along the street next to the tents, he could see the old-fashioned circus wagons parked behind many of them. There were plenty of diesel trucks, too, which were used for the actual transportation of the circuses when they were on the road.

More fabulous than the tents and the trucks, though, were the people. Shayne saw them strolling down the street and on the porches of the cottages, and while many of them looked entirely normal, there were many who did not. He saw several midgets, and also the tattooed figures that the gas jockey had referred to, but nowhere did he see a man who was incredibly tall and equally skinny.

Shayne had brushed his clothes off and straightened them up as best he could, so he looked fairly presentable when he knocked on the door of the first circus office he came to. The door was opened by a fat, pleasant-faced man who said, "Yeah, what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for someone," Shayne said. "Two guys, one of them is a midget, the other is tall, about eight feet."

The man frowned. "What the hell is this, a gag? I got little people,

but no tall ones, not that tall."

"Do you know where I might find a pair like that?"

The man shrugged his plump shoulders. "Almost anywhere around here. What do you want with this Mutt and Jeff act, anyway?"

"It's business," Shayne said, but didn't specify what kind.

"Sorry I can't help you, bud," the man said, putting a cigar back in his mouth. "Let me give you a tip, though. Don't call 'em midgets. They like to be called little people, okay?"

"Sure," Shayne said, "I'll remember that."

He thanked the man and went down the block to the next office. It was the same story there, and it took him three more stops before a blonde woman with a European accent told him to try Callahan's Travelling Circus and Phantasmagorical Extravaganza Show. Shayne frowned in disbelief until she pointed out the tent to him in the next block.

"Right down zere," she said. "Zey have a giant, I believe, and several of ze little people."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

"You are looking for work, perhaps?" she asked as he turned away.

"Ve need a strong man, and you look plenty burly."

"No thanks," Shayne grinned, and strode quickly back out to his car.

He pulled up a moment later before the office of Callahan's Traveling Circus and Phantasmagorical Extravaganza Show. No one answered his knock, but he heard voices coming from the giant tent.

Shayne walked over to it, found an entrance in the canvas, and pushed it aside. He stopped into the tent, pausing for a moment to let his eyes adjust to the dimness inside, and took in the various things that were going on inside.

This was truly a three-ring circus, and all three rings were being used at the moment. A blond man who was nude to the waist and wearing blue jeans was in one ring with several of the big cats, putting them through their paces. Shayne watched him work the lions for a moment, then moved his gaze on to the next ring. That one contained a young woman in leotards who was walking a magnificent white horse around. As Shayne watched, she vaulted onto its back and calmly proceeded to start it off in a gallop as she did a handstand.

The third ring contained another animal act, a man and a group of unruly chimps. As Shayne watched, one of the apes nipped the trainer on the wrist, bringing a wave of laughter from the spectators who were lounging around outside the rings. Shayne gathered that these were performers who were waiting their turns, and as he watched, a voice

suddenly spoke at his elbow.

"Could I help you?" it asked, and Shayne turned to see a broad-shouldered man with a nearly bald head and a handlebar moustache.

"Are you in charge here?" Shayne said.

"I'm Callahan," the man answered. "This is my circus."

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm looking for a couple of people. One of them is extremely tall, and the other is a midg —" Shayne remembered and broke off.

"One of our little people, yes, indeed. We have several. Don't you have any names, Mr. Shayne?"

"I'm afraid not. I might know them if I were to see them, though."

"Could you tell me what it's about? You see, I have to look out for the welfare of my performers. You understand."

"Sure." Shayne hesitated. If he told the man that it was police business, it might make him just clam up tighter than a drum. Circus people were very loyal to each other, Shayne knew, and sometimes they were wary of outsiders.

He put a sheepish smile on his face. "You see," he said, "I'm here to offer them a job. I'm with another circus —"

Callahan gestured sharply with his hand. "Nonsense. I know everyone else in the country who is connected with a circus, and you're not one of them."

That bluff had fallen flat sooner than he had expected it to. Shayne was about to say something else — what, he hadn't decided yet — when he saw another opening in the tent pushed back, and two people walked through it.

It was them, Shayne knew immediately, even though he had never gotten a good look at them. One of them would have been doing good to reach three feet, the other one was at least eight. The tall man was limping heavily . . . like he had been shot in the foot. There was no doubt in Shayne's mind, and Callahan must have seen that certainty in his eyes.

"Mr. Shayne," the circus owner said sharply, "I think you'd better leave now."

Shayne took a step toward the midget and the giant. They had seen him, too, and he could see the sudden surprise and fear on their faces.

"I'm not going anywhere," Shayne said. "Not without those two. And then we're going to see the cops."

Callahan sighed. "I was afraid you'd say that. Victor!"

Shayne stopped. A man he hadn't noticed had stepped out of the crowd of performers. He topped Shayne by at least six inches, and he must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, all of it muscle.

Shayne growled, "Now wait a minute here."

"You never should have come here, Mr. Shayne," Callahan said softly. The activity in the rings had died down, and most of the people in the tent were watching them now. The man called Victor took a step toward Shayne.

The big detective cast his eyes around quickly. All the exits were blocked off to him by the performers, and the strong man was advancing on him. Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea after all. He hadn't had much trouble finding the two people he was looking for, but now the trick was going to be getting out.

"I'm really sorry," Callahan said, and motioned to Victor.

The big man leaped forward, arms out to encircle Shayne. Shayne dropped beneath the grasp and pounded a fist into Victor's stomach.

Victor smiled.

Shayne saw the fist coming at his face.

And the next thing he saw was darkness, dotted here and there with tiny, brilliant stars . . .

IX

MIKE SHAYNE HAD BEEN KNOCKED OUT MANY TIMES in his career as a private investigator, and almost without fail, when he woke up, he didn't know how long he had been out. This time was no exception. The first thing he was aware of was the pain floating around in his head. It was replaced by a bright light that stabbed into his eyes and brought a pain of its own. He squeezed his eyes shut against the light and moved his head from side to side.

"You're awake," a voice said. "That's good. I was afraid that Victor had hit you too hard."

Shayne cracked his eyelids just enough to see the figure looming over him. He recognized the voice now, knew the man was Callahan, the owner of the circus. And he remembered the reason he had come there, the two men he was seeking.

"Where are they?" Shayne murmured thickly. "Where's . . ."

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Shayne. The two that you were looking for are still here. We're all here."

Shayne didn't like the sound of that. As his eyes adjusted to the light, though, he could see the figures ringing him, standing around like vultures waiting for their prey to die.

He was on his back, he could tell that now, lying in the dust of the arena, with the canvas of the big top high above him. The lights that were shining in his eyes were arranged around the top of the tent,

directed down into the center ring.

—Shayne tried to move his hands, but they were tied tightly behind his back. His feet were free, but on his back as he was, surrounded by the circus people, there wasn't much good they could do him.

"I'm really sorry you came here, Mr. Shayne," Callahan went on. "We're really much more hospitable most of the time. But we don't like being threatened."

"I didn't threaten anybody," Shayne growled.

"I'm afraid your very existence threatens us," Callahan said sadly. "You see, Mr. Shayne, we know that you know about the grave out in the country. We had hoped that we could discourage you from investigating what the little boy told you."

"Discourage me hell," Shayne said. "You tried to kill me three times."

Callahan's face became harder in the glare of the lights. "We're a breed apart, Shayne, and we stick together."

"To the point of covering up a murder?" Shayne had picked out the midget and the towering figure of the giant in the crowd around him. "I can appreciate loyalty, but those two killed a man."

"That's not the way it was!" the little man piped up. "We didn't murder anybody."

"That's right," Callahan said. "To answer your question, we might cover up a murder, but that's not what the little boy saw. He saw a burial, all right, but the bastard had it coming."

Shayne looked around at the circus people surrounding him, saw the lion tamer, the beautiful trick rider in the leotard, the man with the rambunctious chimps, and all the others. There was Victor, the strong man, and three men and a girl who also wore leotards and looked like a trapeze act. Shayne knew they numbered at least thirty, and he knew that he was in bad trouble. Maybe if he could keep them talking . . .

"Why don't you tell me about it?" he said to Callahan. "Maybe you could change my mind for me."

"I know better than that, Shayne," Callahan said. "Still, I suppose you deserve to hear the story." He paused, heaved a long sigh, and then went on, "The man that the little boy saw being buried was named Luther Hanrahan, but he was billed as The Sensational Sabre. He did a knife-throwing act, only instead of knives, he used swords; that's how he got his name. And he was one of the most unpleasant people you'd ever want to meet. Last season was his first with us. I knew he'd had trouble with some other circuses, but I thought he had straightened out. He claimed he had. But he had a drinking problem, which is not a good thing when you make your living by throwing sharp

swords at a human target. I was trying to keep him in line, without much luck, but the thing that really set off the trouble was when he set his eye on Betsy." He gestured at the young trick rider.

A murmur of anger went through the crowd, and Shayne could see that they still harbored some hostility for the man who had been called the Sensational Sabre. Callahan continued, "We all told him to lay off her, that she wasn't the kind of girl to have anything to do with him, but he wouldn't listen. He kept trying to force himself on her, she got tired of it and told him off, and he got mad. When he got mad, he got ugly. He started slinging his swords around. John there — " He indicated the giant. " — took one of them and gave it back to him."

"Point first," the giant said, smiling down from his great height at Shayne. His voice was gentle, and his thin face didn't look vicious at all, but Shayne could see glee in his eyes as he recalled his actions.

"We thought about calling the police," Callahan said. "After all, it was a clear-cut case of self-defense. But there are people who don't like us, Mr. Shayne, people who would be glad to have an opportunity to persecute us. We have a reputation for being . . . clannish, and I suppose it's deserved. We decided to handle it ourselves."

Shayne understood now. Everyone under the big top was implicated in this killing. They would all have a stake in keeping it quiet. Which meant keeping *him* quiet . . . permanently.

"John and Arthur volunteered to dispose of the body, and they were in the midst of doing that when they saw the little Fenton boy watching them. They tried to catch him, but he got away. We've been keeping an eye on him ever since."

"I'm surprised you didn't just kill him, too," Shayne said. He was trying to test his bonds inconspicuously, but they weren't giving even a fraction of an inch.

"We're not monsters," Callahan snapped. "Luther Hanrahan was no loss to the world, but we drew the line at killing an innocent child. There was no way we could justify that. We decided to just keep a close eye on him, and when nothing happened for several months, we started to hope that nothing would."

"But then he came to see me," Shayne said.

"That's right, Mr. Shayne. Then he came to see you."

"And you thought he told me about what he had seen, and you couldn't afford to have me poking around."

"He *did* tell you what he saw. He must have."

"In a way," Shayne grunted. "He told me enough to lead me here."

"And that's a shame, because now . . . Victor." Callahan gestured.

The strong man bent and picked up Shayne as easily as if he was

hefting a baby. Victor led the way out of the tent through a back entrance, with Callahan and the rest of the troupe trailing behind.

Shayne considered using his feet to kick out at Victor, but he doubted he could do much damage, and in the position he was in, the strong man could probably squeeze the life out of him very quickly. He would have to wait and hope that a better opportunity to make a break presented itself.

NIGHT HAD FALLEN, Shayne saw as he was carried outside. The other circuses in the area were mostly dark. Victor led the procession to the gathering of wagons behind the tent, and as they got closer, Shayne could see the restless movement of animals in several of the wagons. The lions that had been inside earlier were in one wagon, pacing from one end to the other and giving an occasional throaty growl. Victor passed by that one, though, and stopped before one that was covered with shadows. Shayne could see through the bars a deeper patch of the darkness moving languorously inside. He could hear harsh breathing.

"You never should have come snooping around here at night, Mr. Shayne," Callahan said. "You accidentally opened this cage and let a gorilla loose, and poor Ajax, normally so tame and friendly, was so excited by the presence of a stranger that he mauled you to death."

Shayne snorted. "If you think the cops will buy that, you're welcome to try. But I don't think they will. I think they'll hang it on you in a minute."

"But we'll all have alibis. No, all the evidence will point to an unfortunate accident."

"And you act so high and mighty because you didn't kill the kid," Shayne said savagely. "You might still get by on the death of the sword thrower, but if you go through with this, then you're all cold-blooded murderers."

"Think what you like," Callahan said flatly. "We look out for ourselves, Shayne. We have to in this world." He made a sharp gesture and said, "All right, Victor, take the ropes off him and put him into the wagon."

Shayne felt a surge of hope go through him. This might be the chance he was waiting for. They were going to take the ropes off him so that they could leave his mauled body in the cage with the gorilla until the authorities got there. The odds were still overwhelmingly against him, but at least he might have a chance to pull something.

That hope faded quickly as Victor jerked the door of the cage open, slashed the ropes that held him, and threw him into the cage like he

weighed ten pounds. Almost before he knew what was happening, Shayne slammed into the straw-covered floor of the wagon, the door shut behind him, and he was alone with the ape.

The circus people started to filter away from the wagon, no doubt unwilling to watch what they were doing. Shayne heard the ape shuffle forward curiously, glanced outside and saw that now only Callahan, Victor, and the midget and the giant remained to watch the impending carnage. Victor had a long, sharp pole in his hand, and while Shayne was slowly getting to his feet, the strong man reached inside with it and prodded the gorilla. A low growl came from the ape's throat.

They were going to goad the animal into a rage, and it would vent that anger fatally on Shayne. At least that was the plan.

Victor kept poking the gorilla and its growls were becoming louder. A shaft of moonlight lit up part of the cage, and as Shayne backed slowly away from it, the animal came into the light. It was huge, with thick black fur, small eyes that glinted, and sharp teeth that Shayne could see as it opened its mouth to let out a furious roar at the continued prodding. The beady eyes fastened on Shayne, and it took another step forward, arms coming up to reach for him.

Shayne knew what a beast like that could do to him. It would take only moments for its superhuman strength to tear and rend the life away from him. His brain was racing, looking for some way, any way, out.

But the door was locked behind him, and the ape was coming for him . . . now!

The gorilla leaped at him, and a sudden, desperate idea sprang into his head. Shayne drove his fingers into his pocket and felt them close around the object he was looking for. He jerked it out and flicked it into life as he felt the ape's hot breath in his face.

The cigarette lighter flared brightly as Shayne thrust it at the gorilla's eyes. The ape let out a high-pitched, keening cry of fear. All of his animal instincts told him to be terrified of fire, and he drew back abruptly.

Shayne heard Callahan cry, "Goddammit! Don't let him do that, Victor."

Shayne saw Victor swinging the pole toward him, but he ducked under it and sprang toward the frightened gorilla. He thrust the flaming lighter deep into the matted fur.

The ape let out a howl of pain and terror and swung a heavy arm at Shayne's head. The big detective tried to duck underneath it, but it clipped him and sent him sprawling on the floor of the wagon. The ape was still howling and slapping at the smoldering patch of fur on its

chest, and it didn't notice that the lighter had fallen from Shayne's fingers and landed in the straw that covered most of the wagon's floor. Tendrils of smoke began to rise from it.

Shayne saw it, though, and so did the four men outside. Callahan yelled, "Water! Get water!" More of the circus people started to reappear, drawn by the commotion.

The gorilla suddenly stopped whimpering and yelping and sniffed the air. The straw was beginning to blaze behind him, and the animal turned to see the tongues of flame start to lick up. His reaction was to redouble his panic-stricken hysteria.

Shayne crouched on the floor of the wagon and wondered what the hell he had done. The fire was growing rapidly, and the ape was starting to bound around the cage in a frenzy. Shayne hit the door with his shoulder, the impact sending waves of pain through his back and head. The door didn't give, though.

The gorilla was throwing himself against the bars of the cage, and the whole wagon was starting to rock. Smoke from the blazing straw clogged Shayne's lungs, and heat seared his face. There was shouting outside, and he saw several people running up, carrying buckets of water. If they could douse the fire, the gorilla might calm down.

They never got the chance.

The wagon suddenly started to tip, unbalanced by the ape's constant pounding on the bars. Shayne said, "Oh, *hell!*" and found himself going head over heels.

He felt something hit his head, and then the ape was on top of him, nearly crushing him as the wagon fell onto its side, spilling the burning straw. Shayne tried to roll, but the weight held him down. Then it was suddenly off of him, and when he sat up, he saw that the door had popped open when the wagon tipped over. The gorilla was outside now, running amuck in its terrified state. Shayne crawled to the door and dropped through it.

The fire was beginning to spread now, to the straw that littered the ground around the other cages, and Shayne knew that if it wasn't brought under control fast, the circus would turn into an inferno. The air was filled with yelling, and he was sure that the fire department from Sarasota would be arriving soon, bringing the cops with them.

A figure suddenly loomed up in front of Shayne, and he saw that it was Victor, the strong man. He was still carrying the pole, but he dropped it as he lunged toward Shayne. "This is your fault!" he roared. "You've ruined it all!"

Shayne kicked his weary muscles into gear again, slipping to the side

and avoiding Victor's leap. He was in no shape for a hand-to-hand battle, so he bent, grabbed the pole from the dirt, and spun around just as Victor reached for him again. The blunt end of the pole cracked against the strong man's skull. Like a puppet whose strings have been cut, Victor folded up on the ground.

Shayne could hear sirens now, and when he looked toward Sarasota, he could see the flashing lights of police cars and fire trucks as they sped toward the fire. The air was full of a bedlam of sounds, the cries of people, the shrieks of the animals, the crackling of the flames. It was a scene from a nightmare, Shayne reflected, and it was a little boy's nightmares that had led to it all.

"It's not fair." The voice came from behind Shayne, and when he turned, he saw Callahan standing there, watching his circus, his world, go up in flames. "He was a bastard, a lecherous bastard. He wasn't worth all this. This was our home. He turned us into killers, and now we're going to lose it all. All for a lousy sword thrower . . ."

Shayne clamped his fingers down on Callahan's arm and began to steer him toward the arriving police cars. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly, looking at the chaos around him.

But right at the moment, he wasn't feeling too sympathetic . . .

X

" . . . AND SO THE COPS HAULED US ALL IN, until they could get the whole mess figured out," Shayne was saying the next afternoon. He was in his office, explaining what had happened in Sarasota to Lucy Hamilton. "Once I took them out and told them where to dig for the body, Callahan broke down and confessed the whole thing. The cops let me go, even though they were a little peeved at me for the way I handled things. I drove back this morning, and that's the end of that story."

"Not quite," Lucy said. "You still have to go talk to Andy."

Shayne smiled. He felt considerably better today, even though he was bone-tired. He said, "That's right. His nightmares should be over now, and he won't have to worry about anybody being after him. I don't think they would have harmed him, but you can't ever tell."

Lucy looked up at him and said, "Mr. Shayne, you look like you could use a good meal and a quiet evening at home with your loyal secretary."

"Damn straight," Shayne chuckled. "Sounds good, Angel. I'll run over and see Andy, then come back by here and pick you up. Okay?"

"Okay." Lucy stood up, kissing him lightly on the lips, and said,

"I'll see you in a little while, Michael."

Shayne went down to the street and got into the Chevrolet, feeling his muscles protest at every move he made. As much as he liked his profession, he hoped that the caseload would stay light for a few weeks.

He rolled down the car windows and let the warm breeze play over his face as he crossed the Bay and turned north toward Bal Harbour. It was a beautiful afternoon in the Miami area, and Shayne wanted to enjoy it.

So why was something still bothering him?

He frowned, started to tug at his ear, then made himself put his hand down. This case was solved. Maybe the ending wasn't a completely happy one, but those were rare. They just didn't come along in the private detective business.

But there was something in his head, something that he had seen and forgotten, or something that he had seen and not realized the significance of. Whatever it was, it was nagging at him now.

He shook his head and tried not to think about it. That worked sometimes. He kept his mind as clear as he could until he reached the Fenton house and turned into the driveway from the street. He stopped the car at the front door and got out.

No one was outside, and Shayne started to ring the bell. He pulled his finger back, though, and this time his hand went to his ear as he frowned in concentration.

None of the circus people had said anything about calling him at his apartment and imitating Andy Fenton's mother. How would they even know about her? It was possible, of course, that they had dug into Andy's background enough to have heard about the way his mother deserted her family, and there were probably several women at the circus who would have made the call to set him up for the sniper. That was one answer.

But was it the right one?

Shayne supposed that uncertainty was part of what was bothering him, but was that all of it? He turned away from the front door and walked toward the side of the house. He wanted to talk to Andy before he spoke to Henry Fenton or Anne Marshall, and maybe the boy was in the backyard.

When he turned the corner and saw the neat rows of trees and shrubs, the memory snapped into his brain. He had been going toward them the day before yesterday to take a closer look at something when Barry the gardener had accosted him. Now, he saw again the thing that had prompted his attention — a small tree, smaller than the

others, and slightly out of line with them. He strode toward it rapidly.

Kneeling beside it, he fingered the dirt around its base. It looked perfectly normal, and there was nothing about it to arouse suspicion. But suspicion was what he felt, so strongly that his pulse was speeding up and grim lines were appearing on his face.

There was a tiny scrape of a foot on the ground behind him.

Shayne threw himself to one side as a shovel whistled through the air above his head. He rolled, saw the shovel coming at him again, and jerked away as it slammed into the ground.

Barry yelled, "Goddamn snooper!" He lifted the shovel to swing it again. Shayne saw someone running up behind him.

"Barry, no!" Anne Marshall cried. "Don't kill him here!" There was a pistol in her hand, and she leveled it at Shayne as Barry reluctantly checked his swing. "Get up," she ordered in a low voice.

Shayne stood up slowly as Barry glowered at him. The gun in Anne Marshall's hand never wavered.

"We've got to get him out of here fast," Anne said. "The boy's in the house, and I don't want him to see what's going on."

"I'll bet you don't," Shayne snarled. "You don't want him to know that his mother is buried under that tree. Which one of you killed her?"

Anne's nostrils flared. "You're just guessing."

"It must have been a damn good one, from the way you two reacted when I got near the tree. What happened, Anne? Was it because you and Fenton were playing around?"

Barry laughed and came a step closer to Shayne. "Damn, you've got it all wrong, shamus. We didn't kill nobody, did we, Anne?"

Shayne felt rage starting to grow inside him, building to a point where it would go out of control. In a deadly voice, he asked, "Fenton?"

Anne smiled tightly. "It won't hurt anything to tell you now. He thought that if his wife was out of the way, he could get somewhere with me. You should have seen the look on his face when he came to me and told me. He was devastated when I told him it was no good. Barry took care of the body, and we both got raises the next day."

"Blackmail," Shayne said.

"You bet," Barry replied. "We didn't know the little kid was going to go crazy when his mama disappeared, though. We couldn't let you go poking around here, so we tried to hit you the other night."

It had been Anne on the phone, Shayne knew; the two of them had been behind the second attempt on his life. They didn't know, he

realized abruptly, that Andy's dreams had been real or about the circus connection. They thought that the dreams had been caused by the trauma of his mother's seeming desertion. And they thought that he was here to expose their part in the woman's murder.

So for the second time in less than twenty-four hours, he was facing death at the hands of someone who wanted to cover up the evidence of a crime, a killing that was even more cold-blooded and ultimately more horrifying than the other. Shayne looked at Anne, saw the determination in her eyes and the gun in her hand, saw gloating triumph on Barry's face . . .

"Mike!" The childish voice floated to them from the house. "Is that you out there? What's going on?"

It was the only chance he would have, and he knew it.

Shayne leaped forward as their eyes left him for a split-second, grabbing for the shovel in Barry's hand. He got his fingers on it, twisted as hard as he could. It came loose, and he drove the handle of it into Barry's stomach. The gardener gasped and started to double over. Shayne brought the shovel up and smashed it against his jaw. Barry fell to the lawn with a scream and clutched the broken bone.

Shayne spun toward Anne as she panicked and pulled the trigger of the pistol. He heard the bullet go past his head and bury itself in the tree trunk, and then his hand came up and clipped her on the chin. He snatched the gun out of her fingers as she staggered backwards, then fell to her knees and began to cry softly.

Andy was sprinting toward them from the house, his face twisted in fear and confusion. Shayne turned back to Anne and Barry; they wouldn't give any more trouble. He caught Andy and kept the boy from getting any closer to them.

"What is it, Mike?" Andy asked breathlessly. "Why were you fighting with Anne and Barry?" Shayne saw suspicion in Andy's eyes, and knew that any hero worship that the boy felt for him might soon be destroyed.

"Where's your father, Andy?" he asked.

"He's at his office, but he should be home soon. Why?"

"Can you go call the police for me and tell them to come here?"

"Y-es, I guess so." Andy swallowed. "You've got something bad to tell me, don't you?"

"You go call the police, and then I'll explain everything."

And good luck doing it, Shayne, he thought.

Lucy would have to be understanding tonight, since there would be three people instead of two for dinner.

Andy Fenton was going to need some friends . . .

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*For Major Lansing of the CID Death never takes a
holiday!*

MURDER UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

CHRISTMAS FOR USAEUR PERSONNEL is at best bitter-sweet and at worst painfully lonely. Separated from their country and often their families, soldiers tend to either lean heavily on Christmastime traditions in a desperate attempt to rekindle some ghostly similarity of their previous homelife, or dismiss the holiday season (an inappropriate term for the military as many individuals must work on Christmas) to avoid unquenchable longing that memories sometime create.

Some USAEUR servicemen, however, are more fortunate than

others. Married personnel with wives and/or families in West Germany (mostly commissioned officers and non-coms) live in housing districts. Constructed by the military, the districts consist of clone-like apartment buildings with lawns and driveways designed in a uniform manner. Although these dwellings are far from luxurious, these individuals and their loved ones generally enjoy Christmas much more than the enlisted men residing in over-populated billets, and share their small rooms with persons whom they did not select and frequently don't care for.

Captain John Robertson, his wife and their eleven-year-old son lived in such a housing district. Their apartment was suitably decorated for the season with tinsel garlands hung on the walls and holly wreaths in the windows. A small pine tree, adorned with ornaments and colored lights, dominated one corner of the sitting room.

First Lieutenant Dave Kreitz and his wife had arrived that night to deliver their presents to the Robertsons. After the Captain accepted the gifts, he poured them each a glass of *Southern Comfort* to "combat the cold."

Then they heard it.

A woman's voice screamed angrily, "You bastard! I'll kill you!"

The sound of glass shattering followed the hostile shout. Their eyes rolled up to the ceiling. The noise had come from the apartment above. *Silly reaction*, Robertson thought as he stared at the ceiling. *None of us can see through solid objects!*

"That Major and his wife who live above you are at it again," Kreitz commented.

"Yeah, let's go have a talk with them," the Captain said, urging the Lieutenant toward the door.

"John . . ." Mrs. Robertson began nervously.

"It'll be okay, Marge," he assured his wife. "We'll be right back."

As they stepped into the corridor, Kreitz whispered, "What's the big deal, John? They're always getting into a fight up there."

"Yeah," Robertson agreed. "But I never heard either of them threaten to *kill* the other before."

They ascended the stairwell, unconsciously adopting a silent stride as they mounted each step. Moving into the second story hallway, they discovered several doors opening and curious faces poking out from apartments. Robertson walked to the door numbered 151, the room of the quarrelsome couple. Even as he knocked, he noticed the door was slightly ajar. It swung open slowly under the force of his knuckles.

Standing in the center of the sitting room was a woman. She was in

her late thirties or early forties with blond hair that probably came from a bottle. She had a quietly attractive face, despite the groggy appearance of her half-closed eyes and a crimson bruise on her cheek. A few feet from where she stood was a handsomely trimmed Christmas tree. Lying beneath it, face down, was a man. A blinking bulb on the tree cast a ghastly yellow light on the corpse, emphasizing the fragments of broken bottle that surrounded him and the scarlet stain that covered the back of his neck.

MAJOR CLIFFORD LANSING FOLLOWED LIEUTENANT KREITZ up the stairs. Kreitz was talking nervously as they mounted the stairwell.

"We knew you lived in the bachelor quarters nearby, sir," the Lieutenant explained. "That's why we got in touch with you first. Everybody knows about you, sir. They say you're the best homicide investigator in USAEUR."

"I'm flattered," Lansing commented as he tried to straighten his tie. He'd hastily pulled on his Class-A uniform and overcoat after Kreitz informed him of a murder in the housing district. "The victim was apparently hit with a bottle?"

"Yes, sir," the Lieutenant replied. "Looks like a marital quarrel that got out of hand. Wouldn't expect that sort of thing from a field grade officer and his wife."

"Field grade?" Lansing muttered, wishing he could stop to tie a loose shoe lace.

"A Major, sir. Major Conglose . . ."

To Kreitz's surprise, Lansing suddenly dashed past him, his long legs taking three steps with each stride. Lansing ran into the corridor, instantly finding the right room, as the door was open and Capt. Robertson was standing at the threshold.

"Lansing, CID," the tall, lean Major announced urgently.

Robertson nodded and stepped aside. Lansing entered the room and moved to the still form beneath the ornate tree. In life the corpse had been a handsome dark-haired man, about thirty years of age. Glassy blue eyes stared down at the floor without blinking.

"It isn't Conglose," Lansing remarked with a sigh of relief.

"Do you know the Major, sir?" Robertson asked.

"We work for the same department," Lansing replied, unbuttoning his overcoat. "I'm sorry about rushing in like this," he said, offering his hand to Robertson.

"I understand, sir," the Captain assured him as he shook it.

After exchanging introductions, Robertson briefly told Lansing what had occurred. As they spoke, Lansing noticed the woman sitting on a couch, sipping from a half-full whiskey tumbler. After speaking with Robertson, the Major approached her.

"Mrs. Conglose?" he inquired softly as he removed his service cap, revealing neatly trimmed dark brown hair, graying at the temples.

She nodded weakly.

"I'm Clifford Lansing from the Criminal Investigation Department."

"Thaddeus has mentioned you," she nodded again.

"Thaddeus? Oh, Major Conglose," Lansing stammered, embarrassed by the fact that he'd worked with a man for over a year without knowing his first name. Of course, Lansing and Conglose were hardly friends.

"He said you've been lucky from time to time," she said.

"Lucky, huh?" Lansing snorted. "Mrs. Conglose . . ."

"Would you call me Beverly?" she asked, staring up at him with red-rimmed eyes.

"Of course," Lansing smiled. "Do you know the man lying on the floor, Beverly?"

"I know him," she admitted, looking down at her feet. "His name is Wayne Selby. He and I have been having an affair for the last two months."

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep. Lansing shook his head slowly, wishing he hadn't been drawn into such a sensitive situation. He asked Captain Robertson to wait downstairs, explaining that he'd rather talk to Mrs. Conglose privately. Robertson agreed. Lansing waited until Beverly finished crying before he asked her the next question.

"In your own words, what happened tonight?" he inquired gently.

"Wayne and I have been coming up here lately. Thaddeus is on leave in France, you know."

Lansing nodded.

"Well, he brought a bottle of vintage red wine with him and we had a light dinner. Then we had some wine. Listened to some music and . . . made love." She nearly choked on the words. "After that, we had a few more drinks and I guess I fell asleep." Her brow crinkled as she said, "That's all I remember. I woke up when I felt . . . well, it felt like someone hit me." She raised a hand to her bruised face, "I guess someone did. I got up, looked around, and found Wayne lying there."

"Where did you get up from?" Lansing asked.

"Right here on the couch," she replied.

Lansing quickly gazed about. The sofa was positioned across the

room from the entrance. A few feet away from the couch was another door. Moving to it, Lansing entered a bedroom. To the right of the wide double bed was a large single window. Inspecting it, Lansing discovered it was closed but not latched.

Eagerly, he opened the window, feeling the cold December wind blowing into his face. To his disappointment there was no fire escape or ladder extending from the roof above. Outside was an empty parking lot two stories below. Lansing checked the window sill. The snowfall had been light that day, and none had accumulated on the ledge. He found no scratches to indicate that a grappling hook had been used, or any traces of rope strands.

"I didn't kill him," Beverly told Lansing as he emerged from the bedroom.

"I'm afraid you'll have to be held for suspicion," he said with a helpless shrug. "I'm sorry."

"I didn't do it!" she insisted, bolting from her seat. "Please believe me!"

"I'll do everything I can," he promised, wishing her battered, tear-stained face weren't so compellingly pitiful.

"Major Lansing," she said, gazing up at him hopefully. "Please get lucky *this time*."

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, Lansing drove his white Volkswagen to another housing district in Bavaria. Locating the landlord, Lansing explained who he was and why he was there. The landlord agreed to give the CID investigator a passkey and told him where to find the apartment of the late Staff Sergeant Wayne Selby. As he approached room 241, Selby's quarters, he discovered a man dressed in denim slacks and a sheepskin jacket was already unlocking the door.

"Sergeant Selby isn't in," Lansing said.

The man turned, surprised. He was in his mid-twenties with sandy blond hair cut in short military fashion. His youthful features still resembled a boy's and his mouth turned up at the corners suggesting a ready smile.

"Good morning, sir," he answered in a baritone voice that didn't fit his appearance. He saluted smartly.

Lansing returned the gesture. "Do you mind telling me what you're doing at this man's apartment, soldier?"

"Wayne and I are from the same outfit. Bravo Battery from the 401st Maintenance Battalion at Orwell Barracks. I'm Sergeant E-Five, Allen Gordon. Wayne and I planned to do some repair work today. We're electricians, you know."

"This is Sunday. Don't you have the day off?"

"We've been doing a lot of private repair work. You know, folks who want their radios or television sets fixed, or they have light switches that don't work. Stuff like that."

"Do you live around here, Sergeant?"

"I can't afford to on a buck sergeant's pay, sir. I drove down here from Orwell Barracks. That's my Ford pickup out front. You don't see too many of them over here in Krautland."

"Let's go inside, shall we?" Lansing suggested, pushing the door open. "Why do you have a key for this apartment?"

"Wayne gave me a duplicate. Lots of times he's out chasing the ladies and sometimes he's gone all night and most of the day. We keep most of the tools here, so if he doesn't answer the door I can just go in and help myself." Gordon's eyebrows knitted as he asked, "Has something happened to Wayne, sir?"

"He was murdered last night," the Major told him flatly.

"What!" Gordon exclaimed, staring at Lansing with startled eyes. "Why would . . ." He shook his head with disbelief, "Do they know who did it?"

"I'm working on it," Lansing assured him.

As they spoke, they entered the apartment. The front room bore little resemblance to the average serviceman's quarters. A dense blue carpet covered the floor. The furniture was equally unorthodox, consisting of two steel and plastic chairs that resembled modern art sculptures and a long couch decorated with a leopard-skin design.

"Quite a pad, huh?" Gordon commented.

"That expression is still popular, eh?" Lansing mused, gazing at a bulky stereo set, a wide screen color TV, and a well stocked bar. "Selby lived pretty well on an E-Six salary."

"Like I said, sir," Gordon replied. "We did a lot of repair work. It's one of the few legal ways for a GI to earn a few extra dollars. I save most of my spare bread, but Wayne spent his on women and on this place. He used to call it his *lair*."

Lansing uttered a neutral grunt. He noticed Selby's *lair* didn't include any seasonal decorations. Apparently he hadn't been sentimental about Christmas. Moving to the bedroom, Lansing confronted an enormous circular bed that nearly filled the room.

"He used to call this his rec room," Gordon grinned.

"How quaint," Lansing muttered. "Did he have a nickname for his bathroom, too?"

Walking to a small cabinet beside the bed, he began pulling open

drawers. He soon found a scrapbook style-album. Leafing through it, Lansing discovered the pages were filled with photographs of several women. Some young, some middle-aged, some pretty and some quite plain or even homely. Beneath each photo was the woman's name, address, and telephone number. Beverly Conglose was among them.

"Wayne called that his Victory Book," Gordon told Lansing. "Are you going to take it with you?"

"Yeah," Lansing replied, closing the album. "It may contain some evidence."

"Well, I'm gonna get the tools and get out of here," Gordon said. "I've got a lot of work and I'll have to do it myself now. Today is the twenty-third, you know. Folks will want their stuff back before Tuesday."

Lansing nodded woodenly as he thought of a woman who might be forced to spend a very unmerry Christmas in a prison cell.

MAJOR LANSING ENTERED HIS OFFICE at CID headquarters later that morning. He was surprised to see a small artificial Christmas tree in one corner, a miniature manger scene on the filing cabinet and a plastic *Frosty the Snowman* on one corner of his desk. His secretary, Specialist Fifth Class Wendy Davis, was cheerfully humming a carol as she hung a tinsel garland on the tree.

"I didn't stumble into Santa's Workshop, did I?" he remarked. "This is my office, isn't it?"

"Oh!" Wendy exclaimed. "I hope you don't mind, sir. I just thought it would be nice for Christmas . . ."

"No, I don't mind." Lansing grinned. "But I'm afraid you'll have to finish decorating later. I want you to make a trip to Ansbach and get some 201 files from the personnel department."

"Yes, sir," she agreed, reaching for her coat.

Suddenly, the door burst open and a small man with a nearly-bald skull stormed into the room. He wore a wrinkled Class-A uniform with a golden oakleaf on each shoulder. The eyes behind the thick lenses of his steel rimmed glasses expressed unfettered fury.

"Lansing, how dare you arrest my wife!" Major Conglose snapped.

"I see you got the telegram I sent last night," Lansing commented dryly.

"Beverly could never kill anyone!" Conglose insisted. "You should be out looking for the real killer instead of wasting time here flirting with your secretary who should be doing something better than cluttering up this place with Christmas junk!"

Wendy bit her lip and looked down at the floor. She appeared to be close to tears. Lansing's face, however, assumed a savage expression that forced Conglose to hold his tongue.

"That's enough, damn it!" Lansing snarled, his voice a rasping whisper that was far more menacing than a shout. "You're going through a tough experience, Major. But that doesn't give you any right to take it out on Wendy. This is her day off, but she agreed to help with my investigation. We've accumulated a list of possible suspects and we're trying to gather information about them. Considering the fact that Selby was murdered less than twelve hours ago, I'd say we haven't made such terrible progress, sir."

"All right, Lansing," Conglose said weakly as he collapsed into a chair. "I was unfair to both of you," he admitted, pinching the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger.

Neither Lansing or Wendy had ever liked Conglose. He was ambitious, abrasive and jealous. However, they felt sorry for the crushed little man that sat in the office. Wendy tilted her head toward the door. Lansing nodded and she left quietly.

"We're doing everything we can, Major." Lansing assured him.

Conglose nodded feebly.

Lansing decided there was no easy way to ask his next question, so he was blunt. "Did you know she was having an affair?"

Conglose nodded again. "We haven't really been living together for the last three months. She is quite a few years younger than I. It was bound to happen."

"Maybe not," Lansing mused. "You've always seemed to be pretty involved in your career. Maybe she felt left out."

"What do you know about it?" Conglose demanded.

"You went on leave without taking her with you. Perhaps you should have tried to patch up your marriage instead of jogging off to France alone."

"My marriage is beyond repair. Beverly and I are getting a divorce."

"You still appear to care about what happens to her, Major," Lansing observed. "Maybe you should start from there."

Before Conglose could reply, the door opened and a short fat man dressed in a red suit with white trimmings entered the office. He pulled the fuzzy white ball at the end of a long stocking cap from his eyes before he spoke.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" the figure in the Santa Claus suit asked, his artificial beard bobbing with each word.

"Sergeant Doyle?" Conglose inquired with surprise.

"Yes, sir," the bearded face grinned, "I was chosen to play Santa for a skit at the service club tomorrow night."

"I would have guessed you have the lead in *Hamlet*," Lansing commented dryly. "I briefed you on the phone, Sarge. You're our breaking and entering expert. I want you to go to the scene of the crime and evaluate how the murderer might have gotten in and out."

"Are you talking about *my* apartment?" Conglose asked.

"That's right," Lansing told him. "If your wife didn't kill Selby, we have to find out how the murderer managed to enter and especially how he managed to escape without being seen by the other tenants."

"By the way, Major," Doyle announced, "I picked up the autopsy report from Specialist Woods on my way up." He offered a clipboard to Lansing. "Not much to it really. Selby wasn't killed by the force of the blow itself, but a large sliver of glass severed his spinal cord between the second and third vertebra. Woody describes it as a freak incident."

"Thanks for the review," Lansing said. "I'll read it later."

"I'm going to track down the killer," Conglose stated coldly.

"Absolutely not," Lansing insisted. "First, you're not a homicide investigator. Second, you're too emotionally involved in this case. The best way you can help is to take Doyle over to your apartment."

"All right, Lansing," Conglose growled. "We'll do it your way — for now."

"Good," Lansing nodded. "Oh, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir?" Doyle replied.

"Please change your uniform before you go."

THE SNOWFALL WAS STILL MODERATE as Lansing drove to the Women's Army Corp section of a housing district near Furth. Later, the white down would become a problem, making roads treacherous and travel difficult. Yet snow was generally a welcome sight at Christmas time, although Lansing wasn't feeling very jolly.

As there were very few unmarried female officers, Lansing had little trouble finding Captain Gloria Finley's apartment. He knocked on the door lightly.

"Come in," a feminine voice said, a strange strained quality affecting the tone of her words.

Lansing entered to see a woman in the center of the room performing a perfect handstand. Her compact frame remained steady as her legs slowly parted in a scissors-motion. The muscular curves of her legs and thighs were handsomely displayed by the dark leotards she wore. Lowering her feet to the floor, Gloria Finley quickly straightened up to

stand in the conventional manner.

"Oh!" she said with a start. "You must be Major Lansing. I hadn't expected you to arrive so quickly."

Gloria's face appeared at least ten years older than her body. Deep lines at the corners of her mouth indicated she was more likely to frown than smile. Her light brown hair was pulled back to reveal a series of creases on her forehead. Lansing guessed she was about forty years old.

"You're quite a gymnast," he said with sincere admiration.

"It's been my hobby ever since I was a girl," she said. "I once considered trying out for the Olympics, but my parents convinced me to seek a sensible career teaching mathematics."

"But you aren't instructing the troops in arithmetic."

"No. I decided to break away from my family when I was halfway through college. One of the few times in my life that I surrendered to an impulse. Anyway, I joined the Army as an EM and landed a secretarial job that led to a military occupational speciality in computer programming. Handling computers is all a matter of mathematics. Later a new MOS for computer programming instruction was created. I was sent to Officers Candidate School, got my commission and they shipped me to Germany."

She glanced about awkwardly, "I don't know why I'm boring you with my life story, Major. You wanted to talk to me about Sergeant Selby, correct?" she asked, sitting on a couch in a yoga half-lotus.

Lansing told her about Selby's murder and that her name was included in the late NCO's Victory Book.

"I see," she frowned, her homely features suffering from the expression. "But surely I'm not the only woman in his book."

"No," Lansing answered. "But several of the ladies mentioned have already left Germany and, frankly, you're the only single woman still on the list with the possible exception of a German National."

"And checking out the married women will be a touchy business," she nodded woodenly. "So I'm a murder suspect, correct?"

"Let's say I'd like to ask you a few things concerning your relationship with Staff Sergeant Selby."

"Well, I suppose I can't hide it any longer," she sighed. "Wayne and I had an affair about four months ago. I should have known better. He was twelve years younger than I."

"What exactly did he do?" Lansing asked, cursing himself for his poor choice of words. "I mean, was he just trying to collect sexual conquests or did something else happen?"

"He got his sexual victories easily enough," she said bitterly. "I had a pair of pearl earrings, a little money saved up for emergencies and an antique brooch that once belonged to my grandmother. The bastard stole them one night and I never saw him again."

Lansing raised an eyebrow with surprise. "Did you report this to the military police?"

"No," she admitted, "How could I? Pre-marital fornication is still forbidden by the Uniform Code of Military Justice."

"So is 'kicking a public horse in the stomach'," Lansing replied. "But nobody's likely to be court martialled for either offense."

"What about the UCMJ regulation against commissioned officers fraternizing with enlisted men? I'd be labeled as a slut with captain's bars. Even if the Army didn't court martial me, and bounce me out of the service, or I'd never see a promotion again." She glanced down at the floor. "Besides, I didn't want to admit to anyone that the bastard had tricked me. I was such a fool to believe him. He even told me I was pretty and I didn't realize he was a liar."

"I think you're being too critical of the Army and yourself," Lansing commented softly.

"Thanks, Major," she said, the corners of her mouth nearly turning up. "I suppose all of this will have to come out in court."

"Unless you killed Selby it isn't anyone else's business."

"I didn't kill him," she said. "But the bastard deserved what he got."

Lansing left the apartment. Gloria's habit of referring to Selby as *the bastard* tugged at his mind as he recalled that Robertson and Kreitz had heard a woman shout "*You bastard! I'll kill you!*" the night Selby was killed.

LANSING TELEPHONED MRS. DENA JACKSON and explained why he wanted to talk with her. He told her he realized that the matter was sensitive and suggested that they discuss it privately. She told him her husband, Staff Sergeant Claude Jackson, had gone to Nuremburg to pick up a Christmas tree and he wouldn't be back for at least an hour. Lansing agreed to meet Dena at her apartment.

Driving to yet another housing district, this one near Nuremburg, Lansing found the building and soon began climbing another flight of stairs. As he approached the Jackson's apartment, he heard the sound of knuckles striking flesh, followed by a crash of a body falling into furniture. Quickly, Lansing moved to the door, discovered it was unlocked and opened it.

Lansing recognized Dena Jackson, a young, pretty black woman,

from photographs in Selby's album. She was trying to restrain an angry, muscular black man who stood over a third figure sprawled across a coffee table. The man, obviously SSG Jackson, shrugged her off and reached down to haul the limp form from the table. Lansing was startled to see the battered face of the victim — Major Conglose!

Jackson drew back a fist as he held the dazed Conglose with his other hand. Lansing shouted, "Hold it!" but the black man ignored him and punched Conglose squarely in the mouth. As Lansing advanced, Jackson pivoted to confront him, fists held defensively like a prizefighter.

Assuming a *T-dachi* stance, Lansing allowed Jackson to come to him. Estimating the distance between them to be roughly four feet, Lansing feinted high with his hand. Jackson was distracted for a split second, long enough for Lansing to snap kick him in the mid-section. Jackson doubled up with a gasp and Lansing moved in. Seizing the Sergeant's right wrist, Lansing applied a straight-arm-bar judo hold by pressing down on the outside of Jackson's elbow, forcing him to his knees.

"Struggle and I'll break it," Lansing warned.

Jackson didn't struggle.

"What the hell happened?" Lansing demanded, asking all three in general.

"That man arrived a couple minutes after I finished talking to you on the phone," Dena explained, referring to Conglose who slowly picked himself up from the floor. "He told me his wife was accused of murder. He said he knew I was fooling around with Selby and he wanted me to tell him about it. I was scared — too scared to think, let alone talk. He acted like he was crazy. Then Claude came in and . . ."

"That bald-headed sonofabitch had her by the arms and was shaking her!" Jackson hissed through clenched teeth.

"Is that correct, Major?" Lansing asked Conglose, still holding Jackson prisoner.

"He struck me," Conglose muttered thickly through a split lip. "I'm placing him under arrest."

"Answer me, *damn it!*" Lansing snapped.

"She wouldn't talk," Conglose said lamely.

"And that gives you the right to rough her up?" Jackson snarled.

"Wait a minute!" Lansing insisted. "Sergeant, you struck an officer. Major Conglose, your conduct was improper. I suggest you *both* forget about this incident."

"He attacked you, too!" Conglose exclaimed.

"I'll forget it as well," Lansing replied. "If you're ready to control

your temper, I'll release you," he told Jackson.

The Sergeant nodded. Lansing let go of him and Dena led her husband across the room to speak with him. Lansing ushered a still-groggy Major Conglose to the door.

"Do I have to remind you that *I* am the senior field grade, Lansing?" Conglose demanded.

"Do I have to remind *you* that I told you to let me handle this."

"Since when do *you* start giving *me* orders?" Conglose growled as he rubbed his sore jaw.

"Since you started to behave like an over-zealous rookie. You've handled dozens of narcotics and black-market busts without flying off-the-handle as you did today. You can't possibly be objective about this case. You're too emotionally involved to do anything but get in the way of my investigation."

"What am I supposed to do? Go back to my apartment and stare at the chalk outline on the floor they drew around the man someone murdered there?"

"Why don't you visit your wife?" Lansing suggested. "A prison cell is a very lonely place. She'd be glad to see you. Maybe you can talk things over with her."

"Are you talking about the homicide or my marriage?"

"Both," Lansing replied flatly. "I'm doing my best with this investigation." He grinned slightly. "And sometimes I get *lucky*."

Shortly after Major Conglose had departed, SSG Claude Jackson also left. He barely glanced at Lansing as he stomped out of the apartment and slammed the door.

"He's going to get the tree now," Dena explained. "The first time he left his wallet. that's why he came back unexpectedly."

"He's got quite a temper," Lansing mused. "How'd you explain about me coming here?"

"I told him the truth," she answered. "Claude already knew about Wayne Selby and me. It was ancient history until today. I had hoped not to have to open old wounds, but I guess it's too late now."

"When did you have an affair with Selby, Mrs. Jackson?"

"It ended last month."

"How did your husband take the news?"

"Not very well at first," she sighed. "He slapped me around a little, but I guess he had a right to be angry. Our marriage was under a strain for a while, but it held together."

"I'm glad," Lansing said sincerely, then he suddenly changed tactics and asked, "Did Selby rob you?"

"What?" Her eyes adopted a saucer-like quality of surprise. "How

did you know?"

"You weren't his only victim."

"I work as a clerk in a PX. Selby stole a little money I had stashed away and my wedding ring."

"Does Claude know about that, too?"

She nodded.

"Why didn't he press charges against Selby? It's difficult to get a man court martialled for adultery, but larceny is quite another matter."

"Claude said there wasn't any use," Dena shrugged. "He said all those honkey officers wouldn't convict a white NCO on the word of a couple of blacks."

"Your husband's wrong," Lansing grinned. "Some of us honkey officers have a pretty fair sense of justice." He added, "Somehow I can't imagine Sergeant Jackson being content to just allow Selby to get away with both the affair and the rip off."

"He was pretty upset," she said. "He once said if the Army wouldn't make Selby pay for what he did, he'd take it out of his ass." Her mouth fell open as she obviously wished she hadn't repeated the last sentence. "But he didn't really mean it," she added lamely.

RETURNING TO HIS OFFICE, LANSING DISCOVERED SFC DOYLE was waiting for him. Doyle wore a fatigue uniform (instead of the Santa Claus costume) and munched on a jelly-doughnut as he spoke.

"I had a good long look at Conglose's apartment, sir," he reported. "The Major took off somewhere and left me alone to take my time checking it out."

"I know," Lansing muttered dryly, still displeased with Conglose's conduct at the Jackson's apartment, and slightly angry at himself for leaving the Victory Book on his desk where Conglose could examine it.

"Well, I'd say the killer didn't use a grappling hook or a ladder to enter or escape through the window. Not unless he drove away with a twelve-foot ladder strapped to the roof of his car, which would be pretty conspicuous."

"What about a rope ladder? It could be rolled up into a neat little bundle that could fit into a barracks bag," Lansing suggested, "No one would consider a bag of dirty laundry conspicuous."

"A rope ladder would have to be hooked to the window sill just like a grappling hook. I should add, sir, I examined the latch to the window and I bet my reputation as an ex-burglar that it wasn't forced from the outside. There isn't a mark on that sucker, sir."

"Which means the killer probably entered through the door,"

Lansing said. "But how did he leave? People were staring into the corridor after they heard the woman shouting a threat and the glass break. The killer had to use the window to escape." He snapped his fingers. "Maybe the murderer went up instead of down. Could he have climbed up to the roof from that window?"

Doyle shook his head. "I already considered that, sir. The roof is made of slate and sharply slanted. Since that freezing rain a couple nights ago that roof has been frozen solid. Hell, it would be safer just to *jump* from the window to the ground than to try to get up on that roof."

"As a former Airborne Ranger I know something about jumping from high places," Lansing stated. "Leaping two stories down to a paved parking lot is a good way to break a leg. The killer would have to be awfully desperate to take that risk."

"Or a goddamn acrobat," Doyle mused.

Lansing frowned as he recalled Captain Gloria Finley's gymnastic ability.

"I don't like to say this, sir," Doyle said, "but Mrs. Conglose *could* be the killer. She may have caught the guy trying to rip her off. She put up a fuss, he smacked her, and she hit him back with the wine bottle when he turned his back. Hell, if she was drunk enough, she might not be sure what happened herself."

"I'm considering *all* possibilities, Sergeant," Lansing assured him in a grim voice.

A U.S. ARMY INVESTIGATOR HAS LITTLE DIFFICULTY acquiring information concerning fellow military personnel and their dependents thanks to the 201 files that contain military history and data about the prior civilian life of each individual soldier. However, gathering information about German Nationals isn't as easy. On the morning of the 24th of December Lansing had finally discovered that Greta Muller was single and still lived at the address listed in the Victory Book.

Driving through the cobble-stone streets of Zirndorf, Lansing found the house number. The dwelling was one of several cottage-style apartments packed together in a block-long row. To his surprise, he saw a blue Ford pickup truck parked by the curb. Pulling up behind the vehicle, Lansing emerged from the Volkswagen, walked to the apartment and rang its door bell.

Greta Muller soon opened the door. The photo of her in Selby's album didn't do her justice. Greta had dark blue eyes, a delicate nose and a rich full mouth. Long dark brown hair framed her lovely features. Her torso formed an hourglass (with more sand in the top than the

bottom). Lansing introduced himself.

"Would you come back later?" she asked, her English only slightly accented, "I have a guest right now."

"It's okay, Greta," a familiar baritone voice within the room urged. "The Major and I have already met."

Lansing entered. The room was dark. All the window shades and drapes were drawn; a single candle in a red-glass jar supplied a faint flickering light. Soft music mingled with the coarse sounds of a window blind being raised.

"What brings you here, Major?" Sergeant Allen Gordon inquired as the sunlight flooded into the room.

"*Fraulein* Muller's name is listed among Selby's associates," Lansing replied dryly. "I take it you and she are also friends."

"You might say that," Gordon replied as he switched off a small portable tape recorder, terminating the music. "We're going to get married."

"Good luck," Lansing remarked, as he watched Gordon slip an arm around Greta's slender waist.

"The Major wants to know about your involvement with Wayne, dear," Gordon told her. "He's trying to solve Wayne's murder."

Lansing noticed the sorrow in Greta's eyes as she spoke. "I met Wayne about a year ago in a tavern. We dated for a while, but he could never remain interested in one woman for long. Our relationship became more business than personal."

"Business?" Lansing raised an eyebrow.

"That's how I got to know her," Gordon announced as he kissed Greta quickly on the cheek. "She's a great little singer and plans to become a professional some day. I used to work on the American Forces Radio Network repair staff, so Wayne asked me to help her cut a record. We've tried to interest a record company in Nuremburg, but no luck. I've made a few cassettes of her songs and sold them privately. We've even made a few X-rated party tapes," he chuckled.

"I see." Lansing decided to spring his surprise. "Did you know Selby was a thief?"

"What the hell are you saying?" Gordon snapped.

"Two different women have told me that Selby robbed them."

"Why I'll be damned!" Gordon's anger transformed into amusement. "So that explains why he used to chase after some of those old bags. That sly, sneaky, sonofabitch."

"Did Selby ever steal from you, *Fraulein*?" Lansing asked.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, "He used to give me many nice gifts."

"Do you think one of the women he ripped off killed him?" Gordon inquired.

"I don't know yet," Lansing replied, "But I intend to find out."

LANSING DROVE TO THE HOUSING DISTRICT near Nuremburg. Considering SSG. Claude Jackson's volatile temper and his remark about getting even with Selby, the CID investigator decided to interview him. As he knocked on the door of the Jackson's apartment, Lansing hoped yesterday's violence wouldn't be repeated. Dena Jackson opened the door. Lansing heard an instrumental record of "Jingle Bells" playing within the apartment. A feminine voice that strongly resembled Pearl Bailey sang along with the record.

"Oh! Major Lansing," Dena said with surprise.

"Sorry to disturb you again," he said as he heard a number of voices express admiration and hands clapping in praise. "I didn't know you had a party in progress."

"Do Diana Ross!" an eager voice urged.

"Please come in, Major," Dena said.

Lansing entered the apartment. The sitting room had been decorated with strands of plastic holly, pointsettias, and, of course, a recently trimmed Christmas tree. SSG. Jackson stood in the center of the room as four visitors, two men and two women, sat watching him.

"All right now, honey," Claude said, imitating Pearl Bailey as he swayed to and fro, "If ya'll are tired of old Pearl, I'll do Diana for you."

Lansing watched as Jackson mimicked Diana Ross as he sang "Silent Night." Suddenly Claude noticed Lansing. He stopped singing, much to the disappointment of his audience.

"Easy folks," Jackson told them. "I've gotta talk to the Major here. I'll be back and maybe throw in a little Donna Summer."

Jackson and Lansing moved to the door. The Major said, "You have quite a talent, Sergeant. Are all your imitations of women?"

"No," Jackson shrugged. "But everybody does Bogart and Cagney so I concentrate on female celebrity types."

"Plan to go into show business?"

"Naw, it's just for laughs." Jackson's eyes hardened. "But you didn't come here to talk about my impersonations."

"No," Lansing admitted. "I want to talk about Wayne Selby."

"Crap!" Jackson snorted. "What's there to say? Didn't Dena tell you everything?"

"She told me you were thinking about a little vigilante justice. Something about whipping Selby's posterior."

"So I was daydreaming about beating the bastard up," Jackson answered with a shrug.

"Is that *all*?"

"Oh, I get it! You figure I killed him," Jackson snickered. "If you can't find the killer just pin the rap on a good suspect. Who could be better than a black non-com?"

"You know something, Jackson?" Lansing remarked with a thin, humorless smile. "I was sorry about kicking you in the gut last night, but after that snotty comment, I'm not."

Jackson's eyes narrowed with anger.

"Where were you Saturday night around 2200 hours, Sergeant?"

"I was right here," Jackson pointed at the floor.

"Can your wife confirm your statement?"

"What is this? Are you saying I need an alibi?"

"It wouldn't hurt," Lansing said flatly.

"Dena wasn't here Saturday night. She was in Nuremburg to pick up her folks." He pointed to one of the visiting couples, a pair of middle-aged blacks. "They managed to come to Europe this year."

"Why didn't you go with her?"

"Third degree, huh?" Jackson muttered. "Friday night I had CO duty. You know, a Charge of Quarters NCO is up all night. Then Saturday morning Dena and I went down to the main PX in Furth to get some last minute Christmas shopping done. By evening I was too tired to do anything but sleep."

"So you were here alone?"

"That's right." Jackson glared at Lansing. "You know, this is a lousy thing to have hanging over your head the day before Christmas."

"Well," Lansing remarked as he opened the door to leave. "There's a lady in a prison cell right now who probably feels pretty lousy, too."

SP5 WENDY DAVIS, SFC DOYLE AND MAJOR LANSING sat in his office. Wendy poured a glass of non-alcoholic eggnog for each of them. Lansing sipped his drink thoughtfully and said, "Okay. Let's look at what we have here. Jackson is an enraged husband, Captain Finley is a woman spurned, and Gordon was a close friend who is now engaged to one of Selby's old girl friends."

"Don't forget Mrs. Conglose," Doyle, again clad in his Santa Claus outfit (minus the beard), added.

"We'll include her too," Lansing nodded. "If it was one of these suspects: Who had the strongest motive?"

"I'd say Mrs. Conglose or the Finley woman, sir," Doyle replied. "After all, they were the ones Selby took for a ride."

"I don't think a woman would be strong enough to hit someone with a bottle hard enough to kill a guy that way," Wendy said.

"Any woman who can stand on her hands like Gloria Finley is pretty strong," Lansing remarked grimly. "The use of the bottle as a weapon bothers me. That's not a reliable way to kill somebody."

"It's the type of weapon used in a crime of passion," Doyle commented. "That's why, I hate to say it, but I think Beverly Conglose did it."

"If she didn't, someone wanted it to appear that she did," Lansing mused. "But why would they want her to take the fall?"

"Speaking of falls, sir," Doyle remarked. "Don't forget if that killer went out the window he must have had wings or been willing to take a chance on breaking every bone in his body."

"Well, Finley would be agile enough and Jackson would be desperate enough," Wendy suggested.

"If Beverly Conglose didn't do it," Doyle said, "how did the killer know she had passed out?"

"Did the lab report find any traces of sedatives in the wine?" Wendy asked.

Lansing shook his head. "No. I wish I'd thought of that earlier. Maybe a blood-test would have found something in Beverly's system."

"But how'd the killer manage to drug her if it wasn't in the wine?" Doyle inquired.

"We're finding more questions, but no answers," Lansing sighed with frustration.

"We know one thing," Doyle commented. "They heard a woman's voice in Conglose's apartment. That limits it to Beverly, Finley or Sergeant Jackson with his incredible vocal cords."

"It isn't very likely that Gordon does imitations of women too," Wendy agreed.

"Well, sir," Doyle began as he rose from his chair. "If you don't mind I'm going to head over to the service club and play Santa. After this conversation I hope I can manage to 'Ho-Ho' and sound like I mean it."

"Thanks for your help, Sergeant," Lansing said as the bulky figure in the red suit waddled out the door. "You might as well take off too, Wendy," he told her. "There's gotta be a better way to spend Christmas Eve than sitting around here."

"Okay, sir." She moved to the door. "What are you going to do, Major?"

"Captain Robertson agreed to stop by to discuss the homicide.

Maybe he'll remember something that might help."

"I hope so, sir," she said, stepping into the hallway. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Wendy."

Half an hour later, Captain Robertson arrived.

"I don't know what I can add to what I've already told you, Major," he began, "but I'm glad to help in any way possible."

"Thanks, Captain," Lansing said. "When you heard the woman's voice, did you actually recognize it as Beverly Conglose speaking?"

"No, sir," Robertson admitted. "But then I hardly knew her."

"Did you hear anyone moving up and down the stairs or running through the corridors either before or after you heard the screams?"

"I didn't hear anything *afterward*," the Captain said. "Before that I didn't really notice. People are on the move all the time in the building at Christmas time. After a while you don't pay much attention."

Lansing nodded. "After you heard the woman and the glass break, did you hear any hurried footsteps?"

"No, sir," Robertson smiled. "As a matter of fact I didn't even hear the body fall."

Lansing's eyebrows raised with expectation. "You didn't hear Selby hit the floor? If you could hear the woman's voice and the shattered bottle, isn't it strange that you didn't hear that, too?"

"Come to think of it, yes it is!" Robertson nodded, "You'd think he'd sound like a ton of bricks when he hit the floor."

"Unless he was lowered to the floor on purpose," Lansing commented as he unlocked the right hand drawer of his desk and extracted a .45 caliber Colt pistol.

"Is this information helpful?" Robertson asked as he watched Lansing slide the magazine from the Colt and check its loads.

"It just might be the answer to a lot of questions, Captain." The Major replied, jacking a round into the chamber and switching on the gun's safety catch.

I'M GOING TO BE FAMILIAR WITH EVERY ROAD IN BAVARIA!

Lansing thought as he drove into Zirndorf. Pulling up to the curb in front of Greta Muller's cottage, he turned off the engine and slid the pistol into a GI shoulder holster strapped to his chest before emerging from his car. He walked to the door, rang the bell and waited.

"Oh! Major Lanson, isn't it?" Greta said as she answered the door. "What can I do for you?"

Lansing didn't bother to correct her pronunciation of his name.

"Sergeant Gordon isn't here right now?" he asked, his hand moving toward the holstered Colt.

"No. He should be here later . . ." She stared at the gun. "Why do you have that thing with you?"

"I might need it," he replied. "Greta, I only want the answers to two questions. First, were you and Selby getting involved again shortly before he died?"

She looked down at the floor helplessly as she walked to a large leather sofa. "Allen must not know," she said softly.

"I suspect he already does."

"Yes," Greta confessed as she sat on the couch: "I always loved Wayne. He began seeing me behind Allen's back. It wasn't a very nice affair, I suppose."

"It didn't end very nice either," Lansing remarked. "Now, Gordon said you and he have made some X-rated party tapes. Did he ever tell you to read lines into the microphone?"

"Sometimes," she nodded woodenly.

"Was one of those lines, '*You bastard, I'll kill you*'?"

"Ja. Yes. Why do you ask?"

Lansing sighed, "Sergeant Gordon murdered Wayne Selby."

"No!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "They were friends . . ."

"More than that," Lansing replied as he approached the sofa. "They were *partners*. Partners in electrical repair work and partners in crime. They were thieves. Wayne Selby selected vulnerable women he didn't think would report the robberies and he seduced them. After the victims were involved deeply enough, Selby drugged them, probably with Valium in their drinks. Searching each woman's apartment had to be done quickly so he let Gordon in to help him find the right sort of property to steal. The items had to be small but expensive, yet they had to be things that the victim's husband wouldn't notice immediately. It was a cold-blooded and dirty little business."

Lansing continued, "They might still be conducting their nasty sideline if Selby hadn't decided to get involved with you again. Gordon wanted you all to himself, but he couldn't let you know he planned to kill Selby and he didn't want an investigation to discover their crooked pastime. He needed someone to take the blame. So their newest victim, Mrs. Conglose, was chosen. Selby drugged her Saturday night in the usual manner and let Gordon into the room.

"He probably noticed that Gordon was carrying a container of some kind, probably a barracks bag. That was common as they needed something to carry the loot in, but this time the bag already contained

some important items. One object was a broken wine bottle. Gordon waited for Selby to turn his back, then he drove a large sliver of glass into his neck, purposely severing the spinal cord. Then he placed the corpse under the tree and scattered the rest of the bottle fragments around it. Next he extracted a jar or a bottle of wine and poured it on the floor over and around the body. He couldn't convince anyone the murder was a crime of passion unless it appeared the bottle was still partly full when Beverly Conglose supposedly hit Selby.

"Then he had to take the original bottle that Selby had used to drug Mrs. Conglose. Wine laced with Valium would create too much suspicion. Only then did he play the tape recording, probably using the same cassette machine he had here yesterday. Following your screams of *'You bastard. I'll kill you!'* Gordon had recorded the sound of breaking glass. He should have added the sound of a heavy object falling to the floor as well."

Suddenly the door burst open. Sergeant Allen Gordon entered, a small .25 caliber F.I.E. automatic in his fist. Lansing's hand streaked to the .45 strapped to his chest.

"No way!" Gordon snarled, aiming the tiny pistol at the Major's chest. Lansing slowly raised his hands. "I recognized that white Volkswagen out front," Gordon explained. "I was afraid you'd figure out what happened."

"Allen, don't!" Greta urged as she rushed toward him.

"Don't get in front of me, damn it!" Gordon snapped, "And keep away from him."

"Where'd you get the gun, Gordon?" Lansing asked as he stood by the arm of the couch. "Buy it from the same German fence you've been selling all the stolen jewelry to?"

"Never mind," Gordon growled. "Go on with your story."

"The rest is obvious. You slapped the sleeping Beverly Conglose hard enough to leave a bruise and rouse her from her Valium-induced slumber. Then you hurried through the bedroom and out the window."

"Did you figure out how I managed to do that without breaking my neck?" Gordon asked, smiling thinly.

"My guess is you had your Ford pickup loaded up with mattresses and parked outside the window. Jumping into the truck was still risky, but a lot safer than landing on the pavement."

"How much of this have you told your department?" Gordon demanded.

"All of it," Lansing lied. He stepped back a pace as he spoke.

"I don't think so," Gordon said wolfishly. "You wouldn't have come here alone if you had."

"What makes you think I'm alone?"

"Cut the bull, Lansing!" Gordon snapped. "I don't scare that easy."

"Killing me won't solve anything," Lansing said. "Besides, you've got a black market gun that probably isn't in very good condition and you've never fired it. Even if you hit me, a twenty-five caliber bullet doesn't have enough knock-down power. I'll still live long enough to take you with me."

"Wanta bet?" Gordon snapped.

Lansing moved. He threw himself to the right and fell behind the sofa as the F.I.E. barked. The diminutive bullet tore into the thick back of the couch. Gordon had reacted quickly, but not quickly enough. He popped another .25 into the sofa and began to circle it for a better shot. Lansing peered around the opposite corner of the sofa and raised his Colt.

The big pistol boomed once. A heavy .45 caliber slug slammed into the center of Gordon's chest, lifting him off his feet and hurling him to the floor with its force. The .25 slid across the room. Lansing rushed over to Gordon's still body, knelt beside it and tried to find a pulse. There was none.

MAJOR CONGLOSE AND BEVERLY emerged from the cell-block. Lansing stood in the corridor by a guard station as he spoke into a telephone.

"Yes, Sergeant Jackson," he said into the mouthpiece. "I thought you'd want to know the case is solved . . . Yeah, you might say we caught the killer . . . Merry Christmas to you too, Sergeant."

Lansing hung up and shook his head wearily.

"You seem a little depressed, Lansing," Conglose said.

"Having to shoot somebody on Christmas Eve does that to me," he replied. "Well, how are you two getting along?"

"Much better." Beverly smiled. "I don't know how we can ever thank you for everything you've done."

Conglose shrugged. "It's his job."

"Yeah, and I got lucky," Lansing added dryly.

"We'd like to invite you to join us for Christmas dinner tomorrow night," Beverly said. "Will you please accept?"

Lansing smiled. "Of course." He glanced down at the address book in his hand. "Would you mind if I brought a guest along?"

"What nerve . . ." Conglose muttered. "Oh, all right!"

"Thank you, Major," Lansing replied as he opened the book to look for Captain Gloria Finley's telephone number.

They always laughed at her, so she hated them. And now she had money and she wasn't going to be afraid. She was going to get the things she needed, do the things she had to do.

WHAT HAS EVY DONE?

by MICHELLE LUNDGREN

TODAY'S THE DAY! I'M FINALLY GETTING OUT! I can't wait to get dressed. It's all here: nylon stockings, mirrored compact, my tortoise-shell hairbrush . . . just like Dr. Brownstein promised. It's been so long since I've been well enough to have anything, and now I'm going home. Two years of treatment; this waiting area is so much nicer than that old ward. Everything is going to be different from now on; everything is going to change . . .

The woman is generically young. Her Rubenesque face is smiling, frozen in the expectation of change. Wrinkle-free, it appears childlike: close-cropped light brown hair softly framing elfin features, making her look almost . . . innocent.

She hurriedly strips the hospital "johnnie" from her small frame and lets it fall to the floor. With haste and happiness, she rummages through the brown-bagged packages containing her own belongings and pulls a familiar object from within: a faded gabardine-skirt; bits and pieces of a former existence. Shaking it hard, she snaps the dull fabric back and forth like a flag at full mast and ponders mechanically: *I'll want to iron this soon as I'm out.*

Portions of the sky can be seen through a pentagram-shaped window high above her head. Blue gray at last, and with a scribbling of stratus clouds makes a half-hearted promise of springtime. A ray of sunshine filters in through protective steel bars weaving rainbow patterns with a layer of dust. *It's all so beautiful,* she thinks, sliding the skirt up and fastening snaps at her waist. *I hope my life will be full of rainbows . . . soon as I'm free. I wonder when the doctor will be in to release me. I can't believe it . . . I'm cured.*

An eggshell colored door controlled by hydraulic coils silently wings open admitting a woman garbed in full nurse regalia. She remains standing between the doorwell and the busy hall. Pushing the stainless steel handles, her thick soled white buckskins make nary a sound as she studies the patient already inside.

"Hi, Evelyn. You almost dressed?" she greets, reading a black-strapped watch on her wrist. "Doctor should be in soon . . . huh?" Nurse Davis lolls uninvited into the small cubicle and thoughtfully eyes a bouquet of moist spring flowers wrapped in waxed paper. "You got the flowers? They look nice." She plucks a carnation and, holding it under her nose, smells deeply . . . remember . . .

A natural benevolence turns up the corners of her mouth and with eyes calm as an August sea, the nurse laughs. "I just dropped in to say hello!"

Evy Nolan, a patient at Bellevue Hospital for the past twenty-four months, looks up slowly as she tucks a lacy, long sleeved blouse into her skirt. She is grateful for the consideration being shown to her on this last day (Nurse Davis continues to fidget with the carnations), and is thrilled by the sincerity in the woman's voice. But perilous shadows from the journey to the land of the living still pursue and suddenly, in Evy Nolan's mind, Nurse Davis has lost her sweet smile and instead of a red carnation, she grips a syringe . . .

AT A SMALL BUTTON FACTORY IN THE HEART OF NEW YORK City's garment center, where every employee sits quietly sorting four holes from two, a seat is conspicuously empty. Not that it's such a bad job, but somehow the opportunity to tie plastic circles to white cards all day seems only to attract semi-mongoloids, retirees without pension, and illegal aliens, no matter how old. To have a job at all under these circumstances is fortune enough. If animosity is harbored against the pretty girls who work in Bookkeeping, harsh words are silent. Bookkeeping is a part of the factory kept separate from menial tasks, like heaven from hell, by a heavy, gray-speckled partition . . . with a door! High school graduates with nice faces work there and type names on paychecks each day like human computers.

"One of the ladies from the middle row hasn't showed up this week," says a nervous-looking girl of Spanish descent, her red lips thick and shiny. "What am I supposed to do, hold on to the check, or what?"

"For God's sake, has the woman called in sick . . . has anyone tried calling her?" comes the answer.

"Hey, it's not part of my job to call up the people," Lilly replies with

personal indignation. "All I know is that any one of those creeps could leave tomorrow and I would be the LAST to care. I never seen such a bunch!" She raps the check defiantly in her palm.

"Well, they do the work . . . and don't complain. I don't know where old man Warley finds them. . . but if she doesn't call in, hold her card till Friday, then replace her. Who was it this time, anyway?"

"You remember that last one he hired . . . the one who used to sit and stare and give everybody the heebie jeebies 'cause she grinned just like a skinny Cheshire cat?" spoke Lilly sarcastically, wiping the corners of her mouth. "You know the one . . . I'd drop some papers and she'd just sit there and watch me trying to pick 'em all up . . . not even lift a finger to help. Kinda pretty face, though, but weird."

"Well, one of us has got to report her . . . let Tibbets do it, he helps hire them."

It was a useful suggestion that caught on immediately.

"Good idea! I'll call Tibbets. What was her name again?"

"Nolan, wasn't it?" puzzles the other woman. "Evy Nolan."

LILLY ORTEGA ORDERS BUTTONS FOR WILKES AND WARLEY of West 37th Street. The company is small, family owned for many years, and has a staff of ten to regulate and maintain the plastic presses and transitory factory workers. She opts for a chance to skip down and see a friend and bounds through a gaggle of salesmen and waiting clientele. Behind a wide-topped mahogany desk, skuttled with disarray, sits a ruddy-faced, overweight man chewing alternately on a pencil and a Clark Bar. Breathless, she knocks once, shoves her way inside the melee of paper clips and bulging file cabinets, smiles sheepishly at Tibbets and closes the door from behind.

"Hi, sweetie!" Tibbets bellows in a feminine voice, a startling contrast to his physical demeanor. "What brings you down here?"

"I've only got a minute," she answers warily. "I should've called but I wanted to see you. Listen, you remember that new girl, the one with the mousy brown hair? Evy Nolan was her name. She hasn't been in this week and we wondered whether to cancel her out."

"Say no more," Tibbets interrupted with a waning smile. "I've tried calling her and the darnedest thing: telephone number on her application is listed in another name and when I called, the party who lives there says he's never heard of her!" He thumps a stubby finger on the desk top and looks up at the young girl, his furry, reddish eyebrows arching into a peak. "You'd better write her off, she's not likely to come back."

The brown-skinned woman sighs, hoists her lime-green miniskirt and turns on her heels to leave. "Well, thanks anyway, Tibbets," she called absently, "Wish I could stay."

As she walks upstairs, Lilly applies another coat of shiny gloss to her lips, reaching the same conclusion: *She's not likely to come back.*

EVY NOLAN SITS ON A COT IN A DINGY BACK ROOM of the Bowery Bar fingering a paycheck made out in her name. The sound of a scratchy jukebox seeps in through water-stained walls but she pays no attention, engrossed by the numbers on the ochre-colored paper.

I did it, she snickers to herself. Angus told me I could. Said I was still young and pretty enough to get a job anywhere . . . if I wanted. "Just clean yourself up," he says, "go on down to the employment office and boom, they give you a job!" She laughs out loud, a tired, throaty laugh, and settles herself against damp, peeling paint, eyes turned inward.

I earned this money doin' what I was told, just like them girls with the fancy dresses . . . they had no right to laugh at me. I could be like them if I wanted, she thinks bitterly, just like my momma, greasy lips and all . . . they had no right to laugh . . . them lousy bitches.

A trickle of spit forms at the corner of Evy's mouth. Like a rabid dog. She wipes the foamy consistency with her hand. *I HATE 'EM . . . THEY ALWAYS LAUGH AT ME! But I got money now and I ain't gonna be afraid. I'm gonna get me the things I need . . .* Her eyes gleam as she studies the numbers printed in black. \$225.00.

Cashing the check with a swarthy man who tends the Bowery Bar enables her to pay rent on the flop room, buy a change of clothes at St. Paul's Thrift Shop, and leave money enough for the coveted trip to PathMark. She scurries across Canal Street like a winged rat, clutching the tattered coin purse tenaciously to her breast, eyes fixed on the brilliant neon sign. Safely inside the drugstore window were the possessions she dreamed of, though had resigned the possibility of owning to one of her many fantasies.

She stands eagerly in front of the display case and catches her reflection in the shiny, sun-stained glass. Evy was smiling. (Angus says to smile and no one will bother you). Looking at the neatly arranged shelves, she sees the mirrored compact and matching tortoise shell hair brush smiling back at her. Her jubilation isn't to be contained.

She charges into the store, panting deliriously, and orders the merchandise (much to the consternation of the sales boy who shudders distastefully at her appearance). She carefully lays out six dollars and

forty-eight cents, scoops the stapled bag from the counter and bounds outside, hysterical with joy. In one week she has quit a job, earned what seemed like a fortune, and bought the mirrored compact of her dreams.

Once again, lost in the subterranean safety of the streets, she disappears, thrusting the prizes in the pocket of her skirt. She's one of them now: who would ever know different?

Evy eludes the "bag lady patrol" and spends the next few days hidden inside the noxious atmosphere of the Bowery Bar, a mirror and hairbrush her only companions. And with each passing moment, more anger is being stored; her warped and twisted mind creating reasons to destroy. She has to dissolve the images eating away her brain in order to find peace; *button, button, who's got the button . . . ?* Doomed to seek vindication for something that never existed: erase the sickly, smiling faces of the "fancy ladies." Visions of them screamed at her, taunting her with their lies; especially that Spanish one, Lilly. Always trying to be nice, trying to be helpful. *BULLSHIT!* she thinks, her memory churning. *Nobody's going to fool me.* She bitterly remembers Lilly saying over and over again in her phony cotton-candy voice, "Can I help you Evy, can I help you?" Until the fury of her thoughts hurt so bad she nearly chokes. To a woman who's never felt anything but hatred and disgust, the reasons seem clear enough, and very real. Like hunger to a starving child, she'll do anything to relieve the suffering.

Evy memorized the layout of the flophouse. It was easy to break into the liquor stall. When Angus and the others were short on change, she would sneak into the closet-sized bin and steal a bottle or two of Irish Rose. On her last visit she noticed the bartender had taken to storing cleaning potions as well. Evy brushes her matted hair and charts a plan.

Through empty, blackened halls she creeps, thankful for the rowdy drinkers masking her movements from the bar. She moves slowly, cautiously, stealthily avoiding cockroaches as they dart away from her sudden gestures. She can see their tiny, crusty bodies run as her eyes grow accustomed to the dark. Max never keeps the door locked at night and never seems to miss a thing. *What a fool,* she thinks, amazed at her cleverness.

Once at the door, she turns the rusty knob a fraction of an inch and gingerly steps inside. When sure of absolute silence, she pulls a string hanging from the ceiling and flicks on a dim yellow light. She claps her fingertips together and breaks into a funny, palsied half-smile. *Just as I thought,* she murmurs silently . . . *mine for the taking . . . on a wooden shelf behind the whiskey . . . a lovely bottle of LYE!*

WORK GOES AS USUAL FOR THE BUTTON FACTORY, the empty seat is filled. A pleasant din of mechanical melodies wafts throughout. Garnet-colored buttons plink into garnet-colored piles, while two holes and four holes find homes stitched on separate cards. Nine to five. Everything normal. The skinny black shadow elusive as it fawns its way along 37th Street. First inside the building, then shuffling out.

The obvious has a way of going unnoticed: decent people never stare. Who would have thought it odd to see a "bag lady" heaving refuse on a garbage heap? And who would have noticed the empty vial dripping, smoldering like dry ice? Then comes the first scream. Terrifying and pain-filled. Acute and stifled at the same time. Crying. Sobbing. And screaming still.

A sudden hush crawls over the machines; those working closest to the ladies room shut down instantly. Hands freeze on levers . . . heads remain stationary. Bulging eyes raise slowly in their sockets, following the sounds of agony like rabbits on haunches sniffing enemy in the air. Not a solitary figure moves, all minds zeroed in on one thought: *who's going in there . . . who's dying, and who's going to find out?*

Like a mirage, a cluster of women gather outside the bathroom door. Waiting, mustering courage to push it open; somebody finally does and the screaming starts over again . . . tenfold, spilling shock waves into the street.

. . . Lilly had washed her face
 . . . reached for a paper towel
 . . . somehow, the towels had been coated with ACID
 . . . a face, burned beyond recognition
 . . . a woman, cackling, three stories below.

EVY NOLAN FROLICS GLEEFULLY DOWN 37TH STREET, turning right on Eighth Avenue toward 42nd. Sparkling sunshine fills the afternoon sky with a luscious golden hue. She loves uptown, with its giddy people and crazy colors . . . and so many places to hide. Where one beggar looks like the next, and filthy children run through water-spewing hydrants in place of a bath. Freedom. After a long trek home to the Bowery, dining on fresh, lucid memories, she sleeps the sleep of the innocent. Evy had heard sounds of punishment.

AND THE TIME THE BABY DIED; that wasn't her fault either.

It starts out to be a day like any other; waking with the ingrained chill of too many nights on a damp, uncovered bed. Evy pulls herself out of the flop house to face the morning with a hunger three days old. Her falcon eyes narrow and scan the street, searching for Angus.

Money is growing short; can he help again? Across the street, hovering over a barrel filled high with warming fire, a group of weatherbeaten men pass a bottle back and forth. Evy stumbles closer and hollers over the roar of the flames, "Has anyone seen Angus? Has anyone seen my friend?"

"I seen Angus just last evenin', Missy," echoes a tall black man, his hair wrapped tight in a dew band. He moves toward Evy; she backs shyly away. "Whatchoo want with old Angus? He gone over Delancy Street to try an' steal himself a chicken."

Evy has never seen this suspicious character before and eyes him warily. She presses her brush and mirror securely to her thigh. *This man doesn't know Angus, she thinks, this man is lying. Angus never steals. This man wants me.*

"You's awfully young and pretty to be livin' on the streets, Missy," he speaks, eyeing the trembling hand thrust deep in her skirt. "Whatchoo got in there?" His face seems to gnarl as he reaches toward Evy. She jerks away, grabs a discarded wine bottle, throwing it violently on the ground in front of him. "I ain't no goddam junkie. Just leave me alone." She wraps her arms tightly together and holds them to her chest. Staring into the furrows, she stomps angrily north toward the park, calling for Angus and cursing her luck. Mad at the black man, mad at the world, and hungry. Hungry as hell.

Beyond pigeons and pigeon crap, past picnic table and benches covered with kids, Evy spots the pretzels jutting out of a long carriage. *La de da, la de da*, she hums a silly jingle and preys upon the box like a hunter in search of prize game. **PRETZELS!** Delicious salty pretzels! **AND APPLE JUICE!** Her eyes grow wider. Her stomach growls. *A full carton*, she decides, mouth watering; then something inside the carriage moves. A tiny flick of a blanket and there it is. A baby.

If the mother saw her near it, hanging around, she would surely scream for help. Evy knows she must act quickly, but the baby lifts its bald little head and wails. Her instincts tell her to run, but the pretzels are just begging to be eaten. And the crying, the baby won't stop. *Oh Christ*, she demands, clucking her lips while craning her neck half circle like an owl, *where is the mother? WHERE IS THE MOTHER? PLEASE BABY*, Evy digs nervously into her skirt, *stop making such a fuss. Please, baby, please! Please, baby, stop. STOP! GODDAM YOU, BABY I SAID STOP!* Her head is spinning, aching. She tugs fiercely at her short brown hair until the roots turn crimson with blood.

Got to help. . . got to try and help, she thinks with confusion. *What kind of mother would leave a baby crying? Do you want your blanket, baby? Help the baby . . . cover its screaming ugly tears . . . make it*

stop crying . . . got to cover it again . . . cover it harder.

See, baby, see? Now you stop . . . like a good baby. A good, good little baby. Evy smiles. Satisfied.

. . . cover it once more

. . . hardly crying at all

. . . silence

. . . now you can have the pretzels.

Evy lifts the box and holds it protectively close, like a kitten or a puppy, afraid of crushing it. She coyly slips out of the park, and finds a seat on an old wooden fish crate, oblivious to the swarm of police cars trailing an ambulance in the direction from which she came. She licks the salt and lets the lumpy crystals melt on her tongue, scarcely notices as the blue and white car marked NYPD pulls up in front.

The pretzels go flying as Evy is yanked from the crate, arms quickly wrapped behind; handcuffs, hard, cold, locked on her wrists. The cops slam her shivering body inside the car against a mesh grating. She has seen trouble before and is rapidly becoming sure of three things: this definitely smells like trouble, she is still hungry, and maybe the little baby shouldn't have turned so purple.

SHE ISN'T BEING TREATED AS KINDLY AS THOSE MEN from the Salvation Army treated her the last time she went for a ride. In fact, as the police car whirls its way through the traffic, nobody speaks at all. Evy is frightened. Confused. Her lips split chalky dry and her mouth constricts from dehydration. Where are these officers taking her? She is too afraid to speak; nobody ever listens anyway. She hopes they will let her have water.

Seventh Precinct Police Headquarters looms like an oven-baked sculpture in the midst of squalor and debris. Shadows from the Williamsburg Bridge drop like a blanket as the policemen drag Evy through a red brick parking lot. Within minutes, she is seated in an upholstered secretary's chair. She still doesn't know why.

Staring into her wide, doelike eyes from across his desk is a detective. He folds his hands, calmly reading the report. To Evy's surprise, the clean-shaven man offers her coffee and a choice of anything she would like to eat. *Maybe this isn't trouble after all*, she thinks. She asks for a danish and waits; Angus once said it was best to keep quiet.

Detective Samuels ponders the drawn and sallow complexion of Evy Nolan. The woman nibbles, mouselike, on a corner of cheese danish, gripping it by the edges with spindly fingers that resemble claws. *She's so young*, he thinks. He glances at a framed picture of a girl about her age. He begins to read the notes from her case, ushering

a deep sigh, and Evy feels her solace is about to end.

Her name is Evelyn. The charity ward was home for her the first five years of her life. Evelyn had been the product of rape-infested sperm, while her mother, an illiterate farm girl from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, died during childbirth. The baby Evelyn had family who would have no part of her. Evelyn's mother had run away to New York and God had seen fit to bestow his wrath for the sins of the flesh. Little Evelyn was a demon in their eyes; forever a misfit.

She might have had a chance; there were no signs of brain damage at birth, but an infant spending its formative years on a schedule of eating, sleeping and love enough only to survive will soon be classified. Evy was lucky, though.

... slightly retarded, considered trainable

... eighteen years of shuffling through welfare agencies

... thrown into the streets with a shove and a penny.

What can be done? The detective shakes his head. She's obviously not fit to stand trial. The Puerto Rican baby is dead . . . but what court will convict a mental degenerate?

"Evelyn?" he asks bluntly, startling her. The left side of her face begins to twitch.

"Evelyn?" he asks again with something like sympathy coating his voice. "Can you tell me everything about the accident in the park this afternoon? What happened, Evelyn . . . what happened to the baby . . . do you remember the baby?" *the baby the baby the baby the baby.*

BEHIND THE WELL-GUARDED DOORS OF A SEVENTH FLOOR closed courtroom, a judge without jury finds Evelyn Nolan, age 33, guilty through insanity of reckless manslaughter and sentences her to be committed. A court-appointed lawyer convinces the judge that sending her to Kings County Hospital for the criminally insane would be more hindrance than help. "Evy doesn't know right from wrong . . ." he testifies in her behalf, "she does things on the spur of the moment, without precognizance . . . she's not smart enough to commit acts of violence on purpose . . ." With a sinister grin plastered to her face, a grin that somehow vanishes whenever the judge looks down from his podium, Evy is remanded to Bellevue Hospital, for not less than two years or until sufficiently cured.

While handcuffed to the seat of the prison bus, Evy stares at the pavement outside and wonders if she'll ever see her pretty brush and mirror again. She wonders about Angus, and worries whether he will remember her. During a brief moment of mental calm, as the movement of the bus seems to lull her to sleep, she wonders about the girl

with the acid-burned face . . .

In all her years spent living on the street and even before, when life was wandering through state homes that everyone else called "institutions," Evy has managed to avoid the granddaddy of them all . . . Bellevue. She'd heard stories about it from the best. "Once locked inside those big black gates, nobody will ever hear from you again. And if somebody ever sees you on the street and waves, you can't recognize them to wave back 'cause the doctors would have already cut your head open and taken the brains out." Oh, it was the end.

She remembers how pitiful Angus looked when he told the story of his friend and how doctors went and cut off the man's gangrened feet even though he begged them not to. "Once you're inside, ain't no one ever going to see you again unless they go digging in Potter's Field." Angus had been a schoolteacher (he said) before the bottle became his destiny. Evy trusts him to be telling the truth and prays she'll turn invisible before the bus arrives.

Bellevue. What am I going to do now? Still handcuffed, she makes a sudden dash through the hospital's landscape, toward the wrought iron gates. She trips, falls over a protruding circuit box, and quickly reassembles, trying to overcome the handicap on her wrists. Charging swiftly after her, but not apparently concerned, comes the bus matron followed by two men dressed in white. One of the men carries a coat without arms. Evy bucks and rears, and screams as the first attendant closes in. *Angus was right, she cries within, I'm gonna die . . .*

THE NEEDLE JABS DEEP IN HER HIP, working to lock the mind's door.

Through a hazy, drug-induced sleep, Evy becomes aware of her new surroundings. A sensation totally alien arouses her senses. Warmth. For the first time in months. Evy moves to greet the dawn without feeling chilled.

The aroma of fresh coffee and the idea of eating eggs proves too much of a test. Despite warnings from her friend, Evy allows herself to be fed. Spoon by spoon. Fork by fork. If the eggs are poisoned, she doesn't care. Her head feels light, euphoric. The food tastes good and the nurse doesn't seem to mind when the coffee misses her lips and oozes down her chin. Dizzy and still vague, Evy scarcely notices the little white cup filled with pills.

"My but you ate a good breakfast today," a voice says, removing the tray. "The doctor will be pleased." Evy feels something slide over her feet, then her whole body hoisted off the bed and set into a large wooden chair with wheels. The voice speaks again. "Let's get you

cleaned up, we don't want the doctor seeing such a mess, now do we?" Evy's head falls forward on her sternum and only her ears seem to be working, trying to picture a face belonging to the voice.

"Now don't worry about a thing, Evelyn darling," she hears the voice say as two very strong hands lift her from the chair. "Soon as you're scrubbed and dressed by Katrina, I'll be back." The voice disappears and Evy looks in the stony silence of a big, blond-haired girl.

Evy remains heavily sedated and confined to her bed. After what seems like forever, the fog clears and her eyes register what her ears tell her. She's in a high-ceilinged, windowless, murky green room. Her bed is one of twelve in a ward over-crowded with women who all look alike. Some of the women are standing next to beds, or moving about like zombies, shuffling pink-slippered feet. All of the women have hair about chin length, combed straight and wear plain, sterile gowns with ribbons tied at the back.

The beds seem to meet at an imaginary line and form two neat rows, ending at a door with a small glass panel. Outside, several nurses appear to be talking.

"Good morning, Evelyn dear." She recognizes the honey-toned, twittering voice that fits the face of Nurse Joan Davis immediately.

Evy says nothing. The nurse reaches behind Evy's neck and attempts to fluff up a flattened pillow. "Today's a very important one, Evelyn," she says, talking into the sheets as she tucks them under the mattress. "You're going to meet your new doctor . . . isn't that wonderful? His name is Stanley Brownstein and he's an excellent psychiatrist," she babbles. Evy doesn't understand. "He makes progress with his patients almost . . . well, almost like a miracle. You're lucky you've been a ward of the state," she continued, "or you'd have to wait months until ANYONE could see you . . ."

Evy can't remember *why* she is there, in spite of her luck!

The doctor has the kind of face that Evy'd seen many times when under the care of the Charity Homes. Lots of curly black hair laced with threads of gray. Small, squinty eyes hidden under wire-rimmed glasses. A sloppy sort of mouth that always seemed like it was going to speak but seldom did. A face that would have done just fine without the presence of anything but the eyes.

Were they really "accidents," or treacherous acts of vindication for which she was fully responsible? Dr. Brownstein would find out. Through sometimes careful, but mostly experimental theories, he would work his way into her mind. Pulling, pinching, hot and cold methods of trial and error, until Evy would emerge cleansed and unable to duplicate wrong. It would take time, months of hard, grueling

labor, but he would have results. Evy wouldn't kill or maim again. Only God is omnipotent . . .

"EVELYN? ARE YOU STILL WITH US?" Nurse Davis asks, laying the carnation with the others. Evy straightens her skirt.

"I was daydreaming . . ." She looks up to the window and sighs, "What's it like, Nurse Davis? Has the world changed much since I've been here?"

"Life is life, Evelyn. It's only what you make of it. Once you're on your own . . . don't worry, dear, you'll have all the help you need . . ."

"Where's the doctor?" she asks impatiently. "I'm dressed and ready . . . do you think he forgot?"

"He'll be right in, Evelyn . . . Is there anything you need?"

Evy sighs again. "I don't think so, I'm just so anxious . . . so happy to be well." She picks up the flowers off the bed and holds them close.

. . . think back, evy, think back

. . . remember, evy

. . . try to remember.

The door opens and Dr. Brownstein walks in. "Evelyn, Evelyn, Evelyn," he clucks and sounds absolutely clinical, "you look lovely. Here," he motions to an empty chair, "sit down."

"You really think so, doctor?" Evy asks, holding the hem of her skirt like a little girl about to pirouette.

"Before we discharge you, let's go over the instructions once more." Evy looks attentive and sits still. "We've worked hard, Evelyn, very hard, right?" He was always rhetorical; Evy nods in agreement.

"We don't want anything to disturb our progress, right Evelyn?"

Evy nods agreeably.

"Good. When you are out, you will go directly to the halfway house . . . the address is with your release forms. The people there will assist you in finding a permanent residence. You will be expected, though, to return to Bellevue every Wednesday at one-fifteen."

He pulls out a small pad and pencil.

"Here's your prescription for Tuenol, same as you've been taking. Follow the instructions on the bottles."

Evy shifts in her seat and spots a fly buzzing. She doesn't try to brush it away. Nurse Davis leans against a wall.

"You've been here two years, Evelyn . . ." (*tie her up . . . tie her up . . . lower her into the treatment . . . turn on the cold . . . flush her in . . .*)

". . . it's what the law allowed." (*give her another slap . . . she'll cooperate if she doesn't eat for a few days . . . throw her in solitary . . .*)

"Come, Evelyn, I'll wheel you to the door."

"Can I walk?"

"No, Evelyn, it's a rule." (*follow the rules . . . follow the rules . . . parade naked in front of old Geezer . . . Geezer likes to see naked crazies . . .*)

"Are you ready now, dear?"

(*ready now? . . . turn on the electricity . . . she won't be any trouble . . . did you see the way her body wiggled . . .*)

"We'll take the elevator."

Evy stands up and kisses the doctor on the cheek, smiling. "See you on Wednesday."

She climbs into the chair and allows herself to be wheeled out, through the doors she had entered so many months ago.

IT'S A PERFECT FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN MAY. The tall, iron gates of Bellevue look like the gates of any other private home. Nothing ominous or secretive about them today. Sounds of the city fill her senses: jackhammers, air brakes on busses, taxi tires squealing; the steady hum of heavy traffic rifling First Avenue. Dangerous exhaust fumes take an invisible shelf and cause her eyes to burn and water. Evy breathes deep this initial taste of freedom and suddenly feels very small, alone in a vastness of cars, trucks and cement. Gripping tight her shopping bag, she coughs and tries standing unafraid. The halfway house is three blocks north on 47th street; Evy walks east toward the river.

The sun is behind her now and a shadow, flat and dark, falls without notice in the shape of a woman hunched. The darkness moves as Evy moves and subconsciously becomes her map, each step careful not to fall in the light. She is due at the halfway house, they trust her to arrive, but surely they won't mind . . . this will only take a second. A familiar Cheshire grin draws across her face as though someone had painted it there deliberately. Wide, never changing. Eyes glassy and beaming straight ahead without focus . . . until she sees the fly.

A huge garden-version horsefly with wings that are anything but gossamer makes Evy stop, dead. She follows its nervous movements, mirroring its image, jerking her head when it darts up, twisting her neck when it juts sideways. She hears its razor-like buzzing, and as it does, a panorama of visions creep back into present reality. Like a slap in the face, satanic images grapple with the truth, beating and tearing at the seedlings of sanity still so new and fresh in Evy's mind.

. . . where are you, Evy?

. . . where have you been, Evy?

... remember those who made you suffer ...
and she does.

"Follow me, Evy." The insect turns a somersault in midair. "This way! This way!" It settles on a window nearly obliterated with signs: full-color advertisements selling plumber's putty and OrthoGrow. Bright green letters spelling the words SALE INSIDE. The fly crawls along a giant "E" and seems to be forming an arrow with its wings. "Look over here, Evy! Look here!" Another poster. Blood red letters. Evy spells the words aloud, rolling the sounds on her tongue. The fly lands on Evy's bare arm tickling her as it cleans its filament legs. Evy studies the insect; it doesn't move. The flies are her friends now, and the impact of two years gone by becomes clear.

"ANGUSSS!" she screams, throwing her head from side to side. She speaks to herself now; only her lips move. "They're watchin' me ... but they ain't gonna get me this time. Them goddamn nurses ... them son of a bitch cops ... I hate 'em! I HATE 'EM ALL!" *Got to be calm now, Evy. Angus says to always stay calm. Go on in, Evy. You look just fine. Still young and pretty enough to do anything ... if you want.*

She pulls her mirrored compact from the shopping bag and holds it in front of her face. She adjusts a lock of hair that has fallen across her eyebrows and sticks it behind an ear. A piece of lint is picked from her old faded skirt, and the challenge has begun.

"Good afternoon, madam. May I help you?"
(Evy smiles inside her head).

"Yes, thank you. I need that rat poison you advertise in the window ... not that I have much bother ... but living so close to the river makes me worry."

(Do you think he knows?)

"That's a good idea, ma'am. You want the five or ten ounce bottle?"

"Five ... no, give me the large."

The sales clerk speaks again as Evy's hand sweats around the twenty dollar bill. "You know, ma'am, this is mighty powerful stuff. You might want the super to put it down for you."

(Sickly sweet smiles ... Nurse Davis ... always trying to be kind ... Dr. Brownstein ...)

"I'll be careful."

"You've got to be *extremely* cautious."

(Hurry up, dammit!)

The young man laughs as he takes her money. "Don't let anything but the rats get it ... you might lose a friend or two!"

Evy laughs back. "I'll make sure the rats get it," she says.

In the parking lot below his window the knife went into the woman's shoulder, came out black, went into her face, her neck. She collapsed screaming, and the knife kept going into her, into her, into her . . .

SLICES OF SYLVIA

by STEVEN UTLEY

JUST INSIDE THE FOYER, WHERE THE AIR WAS THICK with dust motes and the smell of tired feet, Harris paused to check his mail box. It contained a statement from his bank and a flyer announcing super savings at a downtown department store's pre-inventory sale. No bills, at least, he thought, closing the box and locking it. No surprises.

He turned and wearily regarded the staircase. The strips of carpet which cushioned the steps were threadbare and tearing loose from the tacks. But it was no use complaining to anyone, he reflected as he placed his foot on the first step, his hand upon the smooth wooden banister. The apartment manager was always too drunk. He ascended slowly, counting. One. Two. The staircase seemed more treacherous each time he used it.

And, he thought grimly, each time — three — it takes me a little longer. Four. Listen to me. Panting. The going gets harder every day — five — and Gary Mitchell Harris gets older. Six. Fifty-eight years old now, my God, fifty-nine years old the month after next! How can it be? Seven. How?

He paused at the eighth step for a moment and added it up, all of it, parents, schools, pulp magazines pored over in bed on humid summer midnights, the war, coming home to Edith, the job with Platt and Sons, Edith coming out of her wedding clothes, a stillborn son,

two miscarriages, Sylv —

He took another step. Nine.

Sylvia Taylor, and after Sylvia Taylor, what was it now? Ten years? Ten?

Ten.

Fifty-eight years, all right, and soon to be fifty-nine. Jesus. Jesus H. Christ.

Eleven.

He had almost reached the top when Ken Parker appeared on the landing and grinned down at him. Parker was an enormous man with deepset eyes. His long, muscular arms and bowed legs combined with his beetling brows gave him a rather simian bearing.

"H'lo," said Parker. His voice was in keeping with his appearance, a rumbling bass growl. "Hot enough for you today?"

Harris nodded and made a gesture of tired triumph as he stepped onto the landing. "One of these days," he gasped, "I'm not going to make it all the damn way up. You'll have to organize a rescue team and come down and get me."

Parker snickered. "Oh, I don't know. From what I've seen, it'll be a long time before you need *me* to get you up!"

Harris stared blankly as the man laughed uproariously.

Parker leaned forward and put his face close to Harris'. "I think you been holding out on me."

A fist closed on Harris' stomach. Oh God. He gripped the balustrade rail and leaned upon it for support. Not again. His heart felt leaden. Sylvia Taylor. Sylvia Taylor. Once again reaching up out of her grave, across half a continent, across a decade. He gave Parker a helpless look as the old excuses began to well up in his throat.

"I see her," Parker said boisterously, "and then I look at *you*, and I have to wonder what it is you got that I don't." He shook his head. "Can't be money." He grinned. "No offense, but it can't be your looks, neither."

Harris felt the fist's grip on his guts loosen. It's okay, he told himself. It's not Sylvia Taylor, not this time, it's something else entirely, this idiot doesn't know a thing about it, relax. Relax. He relaxed. He cleared his throat softly. "Come on," he said. "What're you talking about?"

"The *girl*," said Parker.

"What girl?"

"The girl who came here looking for you a while ago." Parker's forehead arranged itself into a landscape of perplexity. "You mean you don't know any redhead with a great behind and — " Parker

cupped his hands in the air, several inches out from his chest.

Harris shook his head.

"Whew. That's good. Now I don't feel so old."

"What happened?"

"Not half an hour ago," Parker said, "I'd just got in from work, and I'm drinking a beer in my room. I hear somebody knocking across the hall and take a look. And there's this broad at your door. Really a nice-looking piece, like I told you. And you know me, never pass up a chance. So I tell her you aren't home from work yet, can I be of some help? She asks when you'll be in, and I tell her. I ask her if I can take a message or something." The big man leered. "Never hurts to find out if you can do anything for 'em, right? So she says for me to tell you to wait for her to come back, because it's real important. Well, I just naturally thought —"

"She didn't tell you what she wants?"

"Nope."

Harris scratched his throat, puzzled. "Where'd she go?"

Parker shrugged. "Maybe I should of invited her to wait in my place."

Someone entered the foyer below. Harris leaned over the rail and saw Mrs. Metzger. She fumbled a key into the lock of her mail box, took out her pre-inventory sale notice, and gave it a myopic squint before disappearing into her apartment on the ground floor. Harris straightened and moved away from the rail.

"I guess I'll find out what she wants," he said over his shoulder as he headed for his door, "when she gets back."

"Whatever it is," Parker called after him, "just remember, if you need help. I'm right across the hall."

THERE WAS A THIN, SOUR STENCH IN HARRIS' APARTMENT. For several seconds after he had closed the door, he stood with his hand curled around the knob and sniffed curiously. Too many cigarettes. Stale beer, left to go warm and flat how many nights before? He walked across the living room to the coffee table, picked up a half-empty can of beer and an overflowing ash tray, carried them into the kitchen.

The predominant odor in the kitchen was that of ripening garbage. He emptied the beer into the sink, then put the can and the cigarette butts into a grocery bag bulging with coffee grounds, grapefruit halves, potato skins. Forgot to take out the garbage, he chided himself. Always forgetting to take out the garbage. He sighed resignedly and carried out the bag.

When he had returned from the trash bin behind the building, he opened all the windows in his apartment. He washed the mismatched tableware. He hid the dirty laundry and put a fresh towel on the rack in the bathroom. He straightened the sofa cushions. He ran a fingertip across a gray-brown wall. The odor in the apartment was as bad as it had been before he carried out the garbage.

Every place I've lived, he thought, has smelled and looked the same. A bird. A songbird in a cage would be nice. And maybe some kind of plant. Flowers. Brighten up the place.

He finally sat down on the sofa and waited and stared at the day's mail on the coffee table. He never got letters anymore. He had not received a personal letter in ten-years. Not since Brooklyn. He added it up. Not since Edith's letter. But there had been all of those letters before that.

Dear Mr. Harris, one of the letters had begun, I read in the paper about what happened to Sylvia Taylor, then I saw you on the six o'clock news tonight, and I want you to know just what I think —

Unfair. It had been unfair of the media to single him out, unfair for him to have been named, for his picture to have been shown, in newspapers, magazines, on television, for his face and name to have been identified with the Sylvia Taylor incident, for him to have suffered for all nine. Gary, that last letter had read, *I can't stand it anymore, I'm leaving, I want a divorce, it's better this way, goodbye forever, Edith.* Unfair.

Harris put a cigarette between his lips and lighted it. Tired, he thought, trying to shove the ghosts back down into the darkness. Work hard all day in this stinking heat, come home tired, smells bad in here, Jesus. He sucked on the cigarette until his lips felt as though they were blistering. Fifty-eight, Harris, going on Fifty-nine. What've you got to *show* for so much time?

A faded photograph, somewhere, of Seaman Gary M. Harris, USN. Pictures of and a letter from the now ex-Mrs. Gary M. Harris. A string of awful jobs and crumbling rented rooms, leading slowly inland, away from the coast and Sylvia Taylor and his name, his face, his excuses. And Sylvia Taylor herself. It always came back to Sylvia Taylor, who had cost him his job and his friends and his wife and his home and his life.

— what I think of you and the other eight gutless wonders who sat by your windows and WATCHED as somebody sliced up Sylvia Taylor for TEN MINUTES !!!

No, no it wasn't that way at all, you can't call me a coward, I was at Leyte and Okinawa, I . . .

The soft, almost tentative knock at the door repeated itself.

Harris made a sound in his throat, half-moan, half-hiss, and pushed himself to his feet. He went to the door and, placing a hand lightly upon the knob, said, "Who's there?"

"Mr. Harris?" A woman's voice, muffled. "Mr. Gary Harris?"

He unlocked the door and opened it a few inches. The woman standing in the hall appeared to be in her early thirties. She had a full, attractive face, hazel eyes, a wide mouth. Her reddish-brown hair was cut short in a becoming but no-nonsense style, and she wore a light summer jacket over a white blouse and a pleated gray skirt. She carried a large handbag.

"Who are you?" Harris said.

"My name is Vonda Rickards, and I — " She shot a nervous glance along her shoulder as the sound of an opening door came from across the hall. "Please, may I come in?"

Harris widened the space between the door and frame and peered past her. Ken Parker filled the doorway of his own apartment. The big man grinned and winked before stepping back and closing his door.

"That's just Parker," Harris said. "Don't mind him."

"I've met Mr. Parker," the woman said in a level tone. But an angry vertical furrow appeared between her eyebrows. "May I come inside? It's extremely important."

He let her into the apartment. She held her handbag like a shield as she walked across the living room to the coffee table. He watched her walk and remembered what Parker had told him. Yeah. A great behind.

"Won't you sit down?" he said, closing the door.

She gingerly eased herself down into the room's one armchair.

"Can I get you something to drink? Coffee? I could make you a cup of coffee."

She gave him a quick, cool smile. "Thank you, no."

Harris stood waveringly between the door and her chair. "I, uh, if you prefer, I have beer, would you like a beer?"

"No, thank you, nothing. I've just eaten." She pulled a manila envelope from her handbag and began fumbling with the metal clasp. "I didn't mean to keep you waiting, Mr. Harris."

"I didn't mind the wait." He tried to smile. "At least, I don't mind the wait now."

Vonda Rickards looked at him stonily. "You'd better take a seat yourself. What I have to say is a little detailed and should come as a shock. I'm very tired, and I'd rather get this over with as quickly as possible."

Harris sat on the sofa, at the end farthest from her.

She took several typewritten sheets of paper from the envelope, placed them in her lap, and folded her hands atop them. "I'd better begin by explaining who I am. Two and a half years ago, my husband and I started working on a book about the era of senseless violence in America."

"Oh." Oh. He knew. Oh.

"It will be a fairly comprehensive volume, if it's ever finished. Speck, Whitman, Manson. The Santa Cruz murders, the sex-killings in Houston." She pretended to refer to her sheets of paper. "I say *if* because we suspended work on the book when we got to Sylvia Taylor."

He could only glare at her.

"We had wanted to talk to the people who witnessed the —"

"No!" Harris lurched to his feet and stabbed a finger in her direction. "I made the mistake of talking about it right after it happened. It's hounded me ever since. Go find the others who were there. I did the talking for all nine of us. It's their turn."

"They can't talk. Seven of them are dead now, and the eighth was last seen in Boston fourteen months ago. She could be dead now, too. My husband's trying to find her. You're the only one of the nine who's definitely still alive."

"People are always dying." He jammed a cigarette into his mouth. His hand shook as he raised the lighted match.

"When we began collecting data about the Taylor murder, we learned that seven of you had moved out of the apartment building within six months of the killing."

"We weren't the most popular tenants there after the — after it happened."

Vonda Rickards consulted her papers. "July 2nd, the summer after the murder. The Perezes, John and Rita, the two who stayed. They were on their way to spend the holiday weekend with relatives when their car somehow left the road and exploded. August 15th. Eugene Browning, the man who had turned up the volume of his TV set to drown out Sylvia Taylor's screams. Killed by a hit-and-run driver. Mary Mayes was found hanging from a beam in her home in Newark on December 28th of that year. The police said suicide. They presumed a fit of guilt on her part."

Forgotten between his lips, the cigarette burned down toward its filter, and an inch of ash fell across the front of his shirt, and he stood absolutely still.

"March 18th," the woman went on, "one year to the day after the Taylor killing, Mary Mayes' ex-roommate, Sharon Nelson, leaped, fell, or was pushed from a eleventh-story window. May 5th, the same year, Larry Coe died in Syracuse. Another hit-and-run. Now we leap ahead four years. Coe's ex-wife Grace was found dead at her home in Atlantic City, in her bathroom. She appeared to have slipped in the tub and crushed her skull. That leaves you and Ann Neville. About a year after the killing, she broke up with her husband, who, like your wife, hadn't been at the apartment that night. We think she changed her name. We've been trying to locate her, and you, for the past year. You do know how to cover your tracks, Mr. Harris."

Harris removed the dead stub of cigarette from his mouth and crushed it in an ash tray. "Ten years," he said. "A lot of people die in ten years."

"Six of the seven died within a fourteen-month period. All seven died violent deaths."

"A lot of people have fatal accidents. Or commit suicide." Harris pursed his lips for a second. "You seriously trying to tell me that the guy who killed Sylvia Taylor decided to go after the witnesses?"

She folded her hands in her lap again and shook her head slowly. "I'm seriously suggesting that someone who heard about the killing may have decided to . . . avenge her. To punish the nine people who let her die. Someone who was more than just sickened and outraged by your apathy, cowardice, whatever you want to call it." Harris' cheeks grew hot. "A maniac, but a patient, methodical one."

"I think you're crazy," Harris said. His voice sounded strangled. "If you were so sure about all this, you'd've gone straight to the cops."

She dropped her gaze from his face. "We did."

"And they didn't believe you, huh?"

"I'm afraid they didn't."

"Well, I'm not convinced, either."

Vonda Rickards looked at him earnestly. "Even we admit we can't be one hundred percent certain that your life's in danger. But we're certain enough to have stopped work on the book and devoted a year to tracing you and Ann Neville."

"It sounds expensive."

"Yes. Quite expensive, Mr. Harris. We even resorted to a private detective."

He let his breath escape in a sibilant rush and sat down on the arm of the sofa. High on the wall opposite him, a cockroach as fat as his little finger explored a crack in the plaster. He averted his eyes, and to the woman he said, "Why?"

She looked puzzled.

"Why've you bothered?"

"Why, to warn you, of course. Just in case we happen to be on to something?"

"But why?"

Again, she looked puzzled.

"I mean," Harris said, "what's it to you if I live or die?"

The muscles in her jaw rippled. The furrow reappeared between her eyebrows. "What it is to us," she said in a flat measured tone, "is that we may have uncovered seven murders. It may be eight murders by now. As long as there's that chance, as long as we may have the power to prevent another death . . ."

Her voice trailed off into a sigh of obvious exasperation. Clutching her bag in one hand, her papers and envelope in the other, she got to her feet. "Never mind," she said. "I've had a long, hard day on the road, I'm tired, and I'm not up to drawing any comparisons for you. I've told you what I came here to tell you, Mr. Harris. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be going."

"Maybe I should walk you to your car." Harris rose. The woman's expression was completely unfriendly. He made an apologetic gesture. "This is a rough neighborhood sometimes."

"So was the one where Sylvia Taylor died." She gave him an icy smile. "She was a great object lesson for me. I have learned how to defend myself, thank you."

She had taken several brisk steps toward the door when he stopped her with, "Any idea who the avenger is?"

Vonda Rickards paused, wheeled, and studied him for a moment before answering. "No. It could be anybody within five hundred miles of New York. It could be someone who died years ago, after Grace Coe's death. It could be someone you'll never know, never even see."

"If it's anybody at all."

"Yes." She nodded. "If. Goodbye, Mr. Harris."

HARRIS STOOD AT THE CENTER OF THE LIVING ROOM and watched her let herself out. Almost as soon as the door had closed, he heard voices in the hall, hers and Ken Parker's. He went to the door, jerked it open, and saw the woman standing at the top of the staircase. Parker stood a few steps below her, grinning up at her.

"Nice seeing you again, Miss," Harris heard the big man say.

"Thank you," she said. "but it's Mrs., and you're blocking the stairs."

Parker grinned again and held up a six-pack of beer for her inspection. "Say, I've got an idea —"

"A remarkable event, I'm sure." Vonda Rickards took a step downward. "Now please let me pass."

Harris walked to the balustrade and glared down at Parker. "Get out of the lady's way, Ken."

Parker tucked his six-pack under his arm and flattened himself against the wall opposite the balustrade. His grin did not go away. The woman shot Harris an angry glance as she moved past Parker. A door opened at the far end of the hall, and Harris turned his head to see old Mr. Hayes lumber into view.

Vonda Rickards screamed.

Harris jerked around just in time to see a handbag ricochet off the far wall of the foyer below, scattering pens, change, a hairbrush, a dozen odd objects. Several sheets of paper settled lazily through the air. The woman was halfway down the staircase, hugging the banister, panting curses.

Harris pushed past the dumbly gaping Parker and helped her regain her feet. "Are you okay?"

She pulled away from his hands. "I got my foot caught on a loose piece of carpet. You'd better get it fixed, before somebody around here is ki —"

She bit off her sentence and limped to the bottom of the stairs. Harris was a step behind her. She picked up her bag and began collecting her belongings. He helped her.

"I'm okay," she said at length, retrieving a coin from a dusty corner.

Harris handed her a cracked compact and a felt-tip pen. "See how easy it'd be to have a fatal accident?"

She glared, then surveyed the foyer. "I think I've got everything." An awkward pause. "Thank you."

"I'll walk you out to your car now."

Her head came up slightly. "You needn't bother."

He opened the front door and held it open. "It's no bother at all."

Vonda Rickard's mouth compressed into a wide, tight line. She stalked past him, into the gathering dusk. Harris looked up at Ken Parker and the old man, shrugged, and hurried through the door to the woman's side. She stopped beside a dust-coated Mazda and fumbled through her handbag. He heard the clink of keys when she withdrew her hand.

"Maybe we're all wrong," she muttered. "Maybe my husband will

locate Ann Neville in Boston." She shrugged. "Tell me one thing, though."

He waited for the question, but she did not ask it as she unlocked the car and slid in behind the steering wheel. Finally, he said, "What is it?"

"How do you live with it?" She had the key in the ignition slot now. "The Perezes seemed immune to guilt. They stayed. None of the publicity disturbed them. Browning turned up his TV. But it must have affected some of you."

"Oh, yeah." He smiled bitterly. "It affected some of us, all right."

She watched him for several seconds, obviously expecting him to say more. Then: "I see. Well. Goodbye again."

"Goodbye."

He closed the door for her and stepped back and watched until the car had disappeared into the twilight. The stars were beginning to come out. Crickets were beginning to chirp in earnest. Harris thrust his hands deep into his pockets and turned to face his apartment building.

Well, he thought, well, well, how about that? Know what you should have told her, Harris? You should've told her about the war and your time on a tin can and trying to get those guys out of that turret after the kamikaze plane hit it. About the fire, the smell and screams of burning men. About how you and the others tried to get them out. How that should have made a difference to everyone ten years ago, damn it. The guys trapped in the turret were your buddies, damn it, and getting them out of there was your business. And Sylvia Taylor was just some bimbo you'd never seen or heard of before who was out at an hour and in a place she shouldn't have been . . .

He closed his eyes, and in the parking lot below his window the knife went into the woman's shoulder, came out black, went into her face, her neck. She collapsed screaming and pulled the man down with her. He pushed himself up on a hand and knees, and the knife kept going into her, into her, into her.

While we watched.

Harris opened his eyes as a mosquito buzzed in his ear. He jerked his head away from the sound and plodded toward the building, entered and crossed the foyer to the staircase. Ken Parker and the old man were nowhere in sight. He put his foot on the first step. One. He went up slowly, breathing hard, clutching the banister as he counted each step, two, three, way of the ancient, treacherous carpeting. Four, five. Six. Boston, he thought. Seven. Ann Neville, he thought, and savagely kicked at a loose strip of carpet. *Eight.*

Only the jury could decide what was fair, what was just. But where was the justice in someone breaking the law for a lifetime and never paying the price for his violent acts?

BEYOND A SHADOW

by SUSANNE SHAPHREN

ANNE WENTWORTH SHIVERED IN THE STUFFY COURTROOM, tried to concentrate on the intricate needlepoint design. It would be easier once they got started. *If* they ever got started.

One of her fellow jurors fell asleep. The bailiff gently tapped the snoring man, then launched into a bored monotone about not discussing trial proceedings, not associating with people directly involved in the case and *not* taking books, knitting or needlepoint into the jury box.

The bailiff juggled an impressive gavel and a tattered Bible as he swore in the jury panel. Anne was vaguely aware of his words, "answer truthfully all questions regarding your qualifications to serve in this matter," but there were other words competing for her attention.

"*Judge not, lest ye be judged.*" The words were every bit as vivid in memory as when they seemed to pop right out of the worn family Bible in answer to the official notice that had arrived with a small stack of bills and ads.

Anne forced herself to concentrate on the bailiff's droning speech, managed to convince herself it was just coincidence and not fate that she'd been selected for this particular case.

Nothing to be upset about. Not really.

Barely forty and well able to pass for much younger, Anne felt closer to seventy as she smoothed a wrinkle in the simple navy dress and tried to find a comfortable position for the long stint.

She answered clearly and precisely when asked if she knew any of

the principals in this case . . . any other member of the jury, the judge, attorneys, etc.

"No, sir." Not the whole truth; but hardly a lie. It was no secret Mr. Upright Citizen would have denied her very existence in these brightly lit and very public surroundings.

To him, she existed only in the dim motel rooms and out-of-the-way restaurants. To her, he was just a newspaper headline during all the lonely hours while she waited for his call. No, she had never really known him.

The defendant seemed far more interested in loosening the choking grip of his tie than in what was being said. His lawyer, an attractive young redhead, popped up every few minutes like a child's jack-in-the-box. "I object, your honor!" "Objection!" "This has absolutely no bearing on this case!" It was just like the old episodes of PERRY MASON which aired long after most of the world had gone to sleep. Almost.

The judge firmly told the redhead to sit down and "Refrain from those theatrics in my courtroom, young lady!"

Then he instructed the jury to disregard all remarks about the defendant's previous "difficulties" with the law. Anne couldn't quite erase the impact of the assistant DA's carefully worded remarks indicating that the icy-eyed defendant had gotten away with numerous violent crimes.

Anne listened intently as the needle sharp assistant DA wove the few threads of concrete evidence into an intricate tapestry of what "beyond a shadow of doubt must have occurred on the night in question."

The clean-cut police officer in the dark blue uniform told of apprehending the defendant near the scene and identified the dead man's ring, watch and wallet as having been recovered from the suspect. There were no fingerprints on the knife.

Cracking her gum loudly, the dishwater blonde waitress testified she was sure the man sitting at the defense table was the same rude customer who kept demanding refills on his coffee that night and hadn't even bothered to leave her a tip.

During the lunch break, Anne alternated between sipping a cup of tepid brown water the menu had insisted would be tea and working on the needlepoint. She paused suddenly and gazed intently at the bright red thread. Almost the same color as blood spurting from a gaping hole. Anne folded the canvas and put it back into her large purse.

To pass the time, she began people watching. That heavy woman

wolfing down a piece of pie was obviously on a diet, hurrying to consume the evidence of her cheating before anyone caught her. And that man at the next table . . .

Anne shivered as she realized he could pass for another handsome stranger, Mr. Upright Citizen, who had walked right into the needle-point shop and her heart without warning or invitation.

SHE'D PLAYED THE GAME WITH HIM TOO, deciding immediately from his clothes and fancy watch that he was wealthy. His well-modulated voice and intelligent conversation were clues to a good education.

"I'm looking for a birthday present for my wife."

There was just enough sunlight in the shop to make his silver hair shine and Anne could feel his deep blue eyes x-raying her as she suggested a variety of kits.

Maybe it was his refusal to purchase a gift certificate that told Anne the most. Of course, his wife couldn't come in and pick out what she wanted. Poor man. So handsome, so tanned, so perfectly suited to an active outdoors life and tied to an invalid wife. He'd just smiled bravely at her sympathetic remarks.

Anne felt so sorry for him she ignored the store owner's firm policy and promised to have his purchase gift-wrapped when he returned at 5:30.

Lunch money was spent on fancy paper and ribbon; Anne used up her all-too-short break wrapping a beautiful package for the poor invalid wife.

Later, she told herself it had been pity that made her agree to play tennis with Mr. Upright Citizen, who reserved a court for "Mr. Smith." Much later, she fabricated excuses for becoming his mistress . . . even stopping cringing at the thought of scrawling Mrs. Smith on the register at a dozen dingy motels.

It couldn't be wrong to bring a vital physical love to a man like this. He was so loyal, so obviously devoted to his wife. Surely he deserved a little happiness. Surely after all these years of waiting for the right man to come along, Anne was entitled to her share of love.

So innocently beautiful in the beginning and so incredibly ugly at the end. If only Anne hadn't gotten into the habit of looking for his name in the newspaper. She could have lived without knowing his corporation was thriving, without seeing him cutting the ribbon to open his new plant, without coming face-to-face with his very beautiful wife as the happy couple claimed their Best Dancers trophy at the charity ball.

Oh, how he must have laughed at the naive fool who wrapped his packages, shared his bed, believed all of his lies.

But he hadn't laughed their last night together . . .

THE DUMPY GRANDMOTHER WHO'D SPENT THE MORNING sitting next to her in the jury box tapped Anne's shoulder. "Are you all right, dear? You look so pale."

"Thank you for being concerned. I'm fine now."

"It's time to go back in."

Concentrating on the attractive redhead helped to block out the memories. The young lawyer did her job well, trying to tear down the assistant DA's case.

Point by point, she reviewed his evidence, indicating this was merely circumstantial, that was inconclusive. Anne could fault the redhead with only one mistake, putting the defendant on the stand.

The way the defendant glared at the judge, sneered at the jury, the way he mumbled his answers, all contributed to the impression he was lying when he claimed to have discovered the body and looted the valuables, nothing more.

The assistant DA's summation was as clear and precise as his dark suit was obviously expensive and well-tailored. Anne could sense that the dumpy grandmother and the other jurors were forming a vivid picture of his version of the murder.

In Anne's mind, there were other images flashing themselves again and again like the old movies she watched on TV long after he left her to return to his "invalid" wife.

Mr. Upright Citizen wasn't in that parking lot by accident. He hadn't stopped to use the pay phone or order a cup of liquid mud at the all-night cafe. He had intended to spend a few hours in one of the barely clean motel rooms, had planned to make good use of a creaking bed and willing woman.

There was no bungled robbery attempt, merely a shadow waiting. Slipping up to greet him before he could discover there had been no room reserved by Mrs. Smith.

A streetlight caught the glint of shiny metal, shone on the bright red-thread.

The dark young man at the defense table was like a vulture swooping down after the shadow disappeared to take things of value from someone who had no further use for them.

Anne could almost rationalize it away as nothing more than a nightmare fantasy. There was no proof. No one had seen the shadow.

None of the desk clerks from the dim motels, none of the waitresses from the out-of-the-way restaurants, had come forward to identify Mr. Upright as Mr. Smith.

All over now, just history to be forgotten as easily as yesterday's headlines, or was it? If the defendant went free, would the police investigate more thoroughly? So many facts waited to be discovered.

Facts. The judge had repeated again and again that the jury was the sole judge of the facts. Only the jury could decide what was fair, what was just.

Where was the justice in that dark young man breaking the law for a lifetime and never paying the price for his violent acts? Surely it wasn't fair to force a law-abiding citizen to suffer the rest of her life for a split-second aberration.

Still, there was a shadow of doubt. Could two wrongs ever make a right?

Anne played devil's advocate, tried to get her fellow jurors to re-examine the flimsy circumstantial evidence, urged them to think very carefully before they sealed the defendant's fate.

Hours later, the foreman recorded an eleven to one tally. Then and only then did Anne feel free to print "guilty" on a small slip of paper and pass it down the long wooden table. ●

STIFF COMPETITION

Continued from page 129



And now for the ladies we have a tale of murder in a small Canadian village, Alisa Craig's *A Pint of Murder*. When someone dies because of a substituted can of home preserves, a single detective responds and distinguishes himself principally by inertia. There is a great deal of village gossip, which may persuade a feminine audience that enjoys this sort of thing. The writing suggests a first novel, one filled with rhetorical questions that hark back to the days of Mary Roberts Rinehart. But Mrs. Rinehart, it must be added, was a much superior author. A routine effort at best. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95) ●

*Some people deserve to die. Other people deserve to
kill!*

FOR THE GOOD OF SOCIETY

by JACK RITCHIE

THE BIG CAR MOVED SMOOTHLY through the sun-splashed countryside. Evans watched the passing scenery and he seemed to be enjoying it.

He lifted the handcuffed left hand toward the cigarette in his mouth and then decided it would be easier with the free right. He exhaled smoke. "I'm a city boy," he said. "But this looks good to me today. I'd like to get out and walk around."

"Remember it when you try to get sleep tonight," I said.

He put the cigarette back in his mouth and it moved as he talked.

"I haven't been up to the pen for more than four years," he said. "Wonder if they made any changes."

"I'm glad you show interest," I said. "Be sure to look around and have a happy time."

He ground out the cigarette in the ash tray set into the arm rest and raised an eyebrow as he looked at me. "I'll bet you think of me as a killer."

"I had that idea," I said. "But I have a warped point of view."

"What did I kill that really mattered?"

I took my eyes away from the back of the officer driving the car. "I'd say three human beings. Or were there more I haven't heard of?"

The thin smile came to his face. "Let's leave it at three."

"I know you like talking about them," I said. "Tell me again about the first one."

"Let's call that one self-defense," he said. "Nick Walter had a great big automatic that he was going to point at me." Evans smiled to himself for the time it took us to pass a car and then he turned his head back to me. "Wouldn't you say that I did society a favor?"

"Nick was medium bad," I said. "He took things that didn't belong to him. But that should mean jail, not a coffin."

Evans shrugged. "It's a point of view."

"None of it bothers you," I said. "You don't have nightmares?"

"I don't worry about it, if that's what you mean. A thousand people die every hour. Let's see your tears for them."

My eyes went back to the thick neck of the driver. "Somebody cried for them."

"Did they?" He smiled again. "Did anybody cry for Al Tomas? Maybe the wife who got terror in her eyes every time he thought of coming home? Or the parents of the high school kids Nick got into the habit of using the white powder?"

"He got it in the back, didn't he? Self-defense?"

"Let's say that it was kind of dark and I didn't know whether he was coming or going with that butcher knife. I forgot to eat my carrots at dinner and my eyesight was bad."

"The killings all gave you a kick, didn't they? Are you looking forward to any more now?"

"You never know when you get the opportunity."

The big car slowed behind a truck until it got over a hill and then swung left to pass.

Evans' right hand brought out a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket. He tapped one out and used a silver lighter to get it lit.

"But you don't really care about Walter or Tomas," he said. "It's

Frankie Carmody that makes your lips so tight."

"You helped society on that one too. Is that the way you figure it? He was only nineteen, but you read into the future and you could see where he was going."

"What do you think? He had a record that began getting monotonous by the time he was sixteen."

"I'm wondering about the money," I said. "The company claimed there was fifteen grand in that safe. Four thousand was all anybody found in Frankie's satchel."

Evans smiled. "Bad bookkeeping. Or one of the boys in the firm was cheating."

"I hope you hid it good," I said. "You must have had ten minutes before I came down the roof and joined you."

He clucked his tongue. "Now you got the idea that I'm a crook."

"Will you ever get a chance to spend it? There'll be a lot of eyes on you from now on."

THE BIG CAR TURNED OFF THE MAIN HIGHWAY onto the dirt road leading to the State prison.

Evan's eyes surveyed me. "You're lucky," he said. "I had bad thoughts in mind for you."

I looked at the walls looming up ahead. "But by that time there were too many other people around. You could think up a story to explain about Frankie because there was no one around when it happened. But you had to forget the gun when I came in with company."

The car paused at the gates and then shot through as they opened.

"I like seeing people like you dead," Evans said. "But it looks like you're safe for now."

The car stopped and we got out and entered the Administration building. The uniformed cop carried the brown envelope with the records.

We went up the stairs to the receiving desk where a guard sergeant raised his eyes when he saw us and grinned. "It's been some time," he said. "Tickled to see you again, Killer."

I looked at Evans. "They know you."

"I don't mind the words," he said. "I'm not sensitive."

After the handcuffs were off, Evans massaged his wrists for a little while. then he put one hand on my back and moved me closer to the desk.

"Well, he's all yours now," he said. "I brought him in standing up and it makes me miserable. See that life is unpleasant for him. I want him to think that his brother Frankie Carmody was the lucky one." ●

*Mr. Bartholomew liked things clean. The Grand Jury
was interested in things that weren't.*

Mr. Bartholomew

by V.C. KREUITER

EDWARD BARTHOLOMEW OPENED THE CAB DOOR, extended one foot outside and leaned out after it before the cabbie finally said what he'd wanted to say.

"Hey, Mr. Bartholomew. I wanted to thank you for helping my kid with that job."

Bartholomew stopped, turned his head and leaned back into the cab. He was a handsome man, Cary Grant handsome. A touch of white at the temples. Nice, almond-shaped eyes. Lips that neither added nor detracted from the face, and were appealing because of it. A jaw a member of the literati could describe as "the visible equivalent of the solidity of his character." The clothes he wore, upon leaving the bolt, had first settled on his frame. "Job?" he said.

The cabbie was a little embarrassed. "Yeah. The apprenticeship. Pipefitters. You said that you could call for him and they'd let him in like good news." The driver used Bartholomew's exact words. "Well, they did. Just like you said."

Bartholomew smiled. He remembered. "Oh nothin'." he said. "No big deal." He pushed himself the rest of the way out of the cab, saying: "I'm glad to hear he got in." His face appeared in the passenger-side front window and he pushed a couple of bills toward the cabbie.

"No sir," the cabbie said, "this one's on me, Mr. Bartholomew."

Bartholomew pushed the bills even closer to the driver. "Take it," he said, and the cabbie did, averting his eyes from Bartholomew's "And what time have you got, Henry?"

The driver looked at his watch. "Almost four."

"*Exactly* what time?"

The cabbie blushed. He'd forgotten that Bartholomew was a stickler for time. "Four of four," he said.

"Thank you," Bartholomew said. He straightened up, mounted the curb and waved the taxi away. He stood on the curb, waited until the cab had disappeared into the traffic, then turned and looked at the plate glass window fronting the sidewalk. Large letters, in elaborate script, spelled out Mid-Town Billiards. He walked to the door, then stopped and reached over, wiping a finger across the glass. Dirty. Mr. Bartholomew liked clean windows. He clicked his tongue in disapproval and went inside.

It was cool and dark inside. He let his eyes adjust slowly, enjoying the feeling, like a cat enjoys a stretch. He heard soft sounds: a sibilance, a tiny rumble, a click. Here and there he could see a tiny oasis of green, a bright green field under the glare of an exposed bulb. Shadowy figures were playing pool. He heard footsteps approach him from the side and turned his head. There was a short fellow there. Puffed eyes, rugged cheeks, a nose like a sweet potato.

"Hello, Irish," Mr. Bartholomew said.

"Hello, Mr. Bartholomew. I was just wonderin' if you got somethin', you know, anything for me to do. Just for today or somethin'." He raised his shoulders, then dropped them quickly, the gesture little boys use when their minds fail to move their mouths. Mr. Bartholomew turned away, looking over the hall again. He didn't look at the man on his right when he spoke to him.

"You been to see your brother, Irish?"

"It ain't that I don't want to . . ." Irish said.

Bartholomew grunted. He started humming, a flat, aimless purr no closer to melody than malediction to mercy. "I told you about a week ago you ought to go see your brother. It gets lonely in there. Nothing to do but smoke cigarettes and tell time. And I figured you'd want to do that, huh?"

Irish couldn't answer. He had sucked his lower lip into his mouth. His stomach was churning. His arms were crossed, each hand tucked in the opposite armpit. Bartholomew knew he couldn't answer. He let the silence between them get real big, so that Irish knew Mr. Bartholomew didn't have much to say to him. Then he said: "Want a little job,

Irish?"

"Yes sir."

"Get the windows," Mr. Bartholomew said, then he began walking slowly between the tables. He heard Irish hustle off, started his tuneless tune again and wandered between the tables, avoiding the men playing pool. There were fifty-four tables in his place. He knew every sag in the room. Every slow spot. He heard about every dime bet and every dollar lost. He knew when a hustler was working and how long to let him win before telling him to fade. He knew guys who played in tuxedos and guys who played in bib overalls. He had a special fondness for intercollegiate players, and shot pool with them as often as he could. He never played for money. Ever.

When he reached the rear of the room he stopped at a long counter. There were soft drinks there, and candy bars and peanuts and bagged popcorn. If you were known they had a little bottle under there. Sitting on a barstool in back of the cash register was a fat man. His eyes were just visible through the fat. There was a filter cigarette stuck in his fat face, and every once in awhile he belched blue smoke. He had flame red hair. He had huge, fat hands, so big you could tattoo the Bill of Rights on a palm and have room for the explanation. He had a glass of grape pop next to him, and next to it was a bottle of gin, less full than it had been an hour ago.

"How'd you do at the races last night, Walter?" Bartholomew asked.

Walter coughed, wheezed, and wiped his mouth into what he figured for a grin. "Heck, you knew how I was gonna do yestiddy afternoon, Mr. Bartholomew."

Bartholomew tilted his head back and laughed. That made Walter happy. He wasn't always sure about when to tickle the boss. Bartholomew said: "I got the good tips, huh?"

"They run just like you said they would, Mr. Bartholomew."

"That's good. That's good. Must have been my lucky day, yesterday." Walter smiled and nodded his head rapidly. Then Mr. Bartholomew said: "Is Kramer upstairs?"

No jokes now. Walter knew about Kramer. He said, "Yes, sir."

"What time did he come in?"

"Three thirty on the nose, Mr. Bartholomew."

"He go right upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

Bartholomew's eyes drifted out toward the tables. They glazed, like they were turning inward, then he said: "You stick around tonight, huh, Walter?" in a flat, emotionless voice. He walked all the way to the

rear of the room. A door with frosted glass was in the wall. He had to unlock it. Inside, stairs, exactly twenty-six, led up to another door. He mounted them slowly, and when he reached the top the door opened before he could touch the knob. Handy Kramer had heard him coming.

EDWARD BARTHOLOMEW HAD A FOYER, AN ATRIUM, just outside his apartment proper. It was carpeted with an expensive plush. The paneling was of the variety that had once actually belonged to a tree. The lamps were real brass. The cushions on the couch weren't worn out. It was as comfortable, as fashionable a room as you might find anywhere. But it was a waiting room, nonetheless, and Handy Kramer knew it.

Bartholomew stepped inside, passed Kramer without saying a word, crossed a good ten feet of carpet, unlocked the door to his apartment, reached in and flicked on the light, and entered. He left the door open behind him. That meant Kramer should follow. Kramer did, stopping just inside the door. He pushed the door closed behind him and remained standing.

Bartholomew had left the room, and Kramer could hear him moving around in the rear of the apartment. It was a big apartment. Kramer had seen it all one time, when the boss had it remodeled and wanted to show it off to everyone. Kramer, when he described it to anyone, said it was "lavish," because that's what Mr. Bartholomew called it: lavish. When Bartholomew came back to what was the living room he was wearing a knit shirt over double-knit slacks, wearing expensive sneakers on his feet. He looked very casual.

"Sit down, Handy," Bartholomew said. "Drink?"

"No, sir," Handy said.

Bartholomew made himself a drink. Scotch and water. Just enough Scotch to flavor the water. Just enough ice to keep it cool until it was all gone. Then he sat down across the room. He said: "I guess you heard about the grand jury, huh?"

Handy Kramer blinked. "Yes, sir." His mouth moved like he was waiting to say more but he couldn't come up with a right line.

Bartholomew leaned his head back to where he was looking at the ceiling. "Three days ago they met. Three days. You know that, don't ya?" He dropped his gaze on Handy Kramer and waited until Kramer said he did. "And you know what? They're readin' biographies on Edward Bartholomew. Someone's been running a mimeo machine just so they can read about me. Right?" Bartholomew pinched his eyes

between thumb and forefinger. "So how come not a word from you, buddy? That disappoints the hell out of me."

"Mr. Bartholomew, I . . ."

"Mr. Bartholomew nothin'. Mr. Bartholomew *nothin'*." Bartholomew stood up, ran a hand through his hair. He crossed to the mantel above the fireplace, picked a pipe from the rack. He took a minute stuffing it, just right, then lit it. Without looking at Kramer he said: "You been taking cocaine too, Handy."

"No, Mr. Bartholomew, I . . ."

"Don't lie to me!" Bartholomew turned on Kramer. His carriage was perfectly straight, like a trial lawyer, like a schoolmaster, and his eyes were black. "You take cocaine. I know it. Don't deny it. Then you act like Mr. Big Guy. I heard about it. 'I'm Handy Kramer. I work in the *bizness* with Edward Bartholomew. Blah, blah, blah.' And you shoot your mouth off all over the place, being such a Mr. Big Guy. I heard about it more than once." Bartholomew put the pipe on the mantel to die, then crossed the room so that he stood in front of Kramer.

"It's your girl the grand jury is looking to talk to, Handy."

Handy Kramer's breath stopped, shallow. The question that worked across his forehead was not one of what, but of how much. His eyes were downcast, at Bartholomew's feet.

Bartholomew said: "How much did you tell her about me?"

Kramer started shaking his head. In his mind pictures were forming, dissolving, then forming again. It was him and the girl. He'd met her through a couple of guys and sat at a table with her and she'd held his hand and flashed a smile that would melt steam. They started seeing each other and she always addressed him in a half-whisper. It made him feel big to tell her about him and his position with Mr. Bartholomew. Now he wished he'd never seen her.

"No, Mr. Bartholomew," he said. "She don't know anything, I swear. There's no way . . . there's no way . . ." He couldn't bring himself to mention the grand jury.

"I'm gonna meet her," Bartholomew said.

"Anytime, Mr. Bartholomew, anytime."

"Tonight."

"Okay, I'll call her and . . ."

"It's taken care of already, Handy. Carl arranged it this morning. He's seeing to it that she's at your house at nine o'clock tonight." Bartholomew was watching Kramer's face. There was tension in his voice. There was a touch of "There's-more-to-come" in his voice, like the DA always uses.

Kramer said: "Okay, Mr. Bartholomew. Great." Intermittently Kramer tapped his foot quickly, stopped, and tapped again. "I'm sorry about this," he said softly.

Bartholomew sprang forward, quickly and effortlessly, and slapped Kramer. He waited to see the startled look, then slapped him again. He straightened up, just as quickly. "Don't bother me with sorry, Handy. You know better than that stuff. I got guys telling me to turn you into fish food and you tell me you're sorry?" He shook his head and frowned. "You know better." He returned to his seat across the room. "What's her name?"

"Debby. Debby Holtman."

Bartholomew shook his head, like frustrated fathers do. "I hope she can answer questions. I mean I *really* hope. For her sake and yours."

"I can talk to her, Mr. Bartholomew. I can talk to her, y'know?"

"No, I don't. You're busy all day. You're gonna be busy for a long time. I give you a little responsibility and you gotta tell everybody about it. And you meet some girl that gets paid to listen and then you wanna call it love." He shook his head again in disgust.

"It ain't like that, Mr. Bartholomew."

"Shut up. I ought to make you take Walter's job. You want to sit behind that counter all day? Huh?" Kramer's head was down.

"Huh?"

"No, sir."

"Look at me!" Bartholomew said. Kramer lifted his eyes. "You go with Eddy Tardino today," Bartholomew said. "He's gonna show you all his stops today. He gets your route from now on."

There was malice in his voice, polished anger, but in a perverted way that soothed Handy Kramer. It meant he would be disciplined, and that he could understand. He would be demoted. Kicked downstairs. Eddy Tardino had the jukebox, pinball machine, mom-and-pop circuit. But Handy could welcome it. The alternatives were worse.

Bartholomew stood up, looked at his watch, then paced to the mantel again. "It's four-twenty. Eddy said to meet him at Calico's at five o'clock. He said he ain't waiting, so be there. Get out."

Kramer stood up and turned for the door. His hand was on the knob when he heard Bartholomew say his name. He turned to face his boss and the boss said: "Tonight we'll see that your girlfriend understands the language, huh?"

"Sure, Mr. Bartholomew," Kramer said. Bartholomew watched him leave, then went to the phone and dialed downstairs.

"Walter, what time is it? Okay ./. now I want you to do this. Find me somebody to shoot pool with tonight. Some real good kid. Try and

get that English kid from Washington University; tell him we'll send a car. And get some stuff from a deli. And some real good Scotch. Yeah. I'd like to start about nine o'clock. Yeah. As long as the kid wants to play. Sure."

He hung up, walked back to his bedroom, lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. He woke at eight o'clock, took his time showering and shaving, and at nine o'clock sharp he went downstairs. The kid was a proper Britisher, dressed quietly and tastefully. He said he was very pleased to be playing billiards with Edward Bartholomew.

EDDY TARDINO WAS RUBBING IT IN. BEING OVERLY NICE. Real buddy-buddy. He introduced Handy as the new man at all the stops. He slapped Handy on the back in all the taverns, introduced him around like a kid just getting a glimpse of the world. At a place called The Stables he got a table and bought Handy's beer and got three hookers who worked out of there to sit with them. He was painstaking in explaining to Handy how to collect kickback, something Handy had been doing when Eddy Tardino was sneaking smokes in the high school john. And though it grated on Handy's nerves, he knew it was okay. He'd get back. He could learn the lesson; after all, that's what it was about. He'd been stupid. That was the one thing that was making his nerves buzz. It shamed him. All the time he cursed Debby Holtman he knew, back behind his eyes where it was making his head throb, he knew it wasn't her. So he had to be on his guard. He had to be careful and do the work. Maybe pick up a few places that Eddy had ignored. And keep his ear to the rail, because when the train came by again he wanted to jump back on. There had been other grand juries. He could trust some of the guys . . . they could keep him posted on how Eddy was doing. And in a year . . .

Tardino dropped him off at his car at 8:50. The sarcastic remarks were still flowing, but Handy let them flow by. He didn't even hear Tardino say goodnight. He got in his car and drove the several miles to his house, arriving at 9:15. He entered through his kitchen. Leaning against the refrigerator was Carl Bartholomew, the Mr.'s nephew. He wasn't as handsome as his uncle. His eyes were small, fishy, and his nose seemed stabbed onto his face as an afterthought. He dressed flashy.

"Mr. Bartholomew ain't gonna make it for a while," Carl said. He always referred to his uncle as "Mr." "He said it might be ten o'clock. He got held up or something." Carl didn't look at Handy when he spoke. His eyes somehow managed to avoid every other pair in the world. He was that way.

"Where's Debby?" Handy asked. He wished it had been anybody but Carl. Anybody. Carl was bad luck.

Carl smiled and pointed his eyes at Handy's forehead. "She's in the other room, watching TV."

Kramer walked past Carl, went through a swinging door into a hallway, walked the hallway into the living room. He crossed it to where another doorway, double glass doors, opened into what he called his study. He'd bought books and shelves to put them on and stuck a big TV under it all. He poked his head inside. The only light was the blue from the TV. He could see his girlfriend's head just over the top of an armchair. He knew he couldn't be mad at her. He was crazy for her so he knew right away.

"Babe," he said. It was just above a whisper. "We got to talk. Right now, quick." He walked to the chair and petted her hair. Her head slipped sideways. Then her trunk dipped forward in the chair. Handy knew right away. "Oh, God," he said. He kneeled down and looked at her. The blood was still damp. It was on her neck and arms and on her skirt. He looked down and at his feet lay a butcher knife. Then the lights flicked on.

Kramer swept the knife from the floor and stood up. Carl was in the doorway. Carl was looking at the knife, a crazy smile just pushing at his lips. He raised his eyes to Handy's forehead.

"Gee, Handy, you murder your girlfriend, did ya?" Carl brought his right hand up and showed Handy a .44, blue like suffocation.

Kramer looked at the knife in his hand; it was black from blood. It was heavy, sticky, and it was clutching at his hand. Before he could look up he heard the gun bark. Then he was falling down and he couldn't look up. Falling faster and faster and not looking up and hearing a roar in his ears, the knife melting into his hand.

Carl Bartholomew used the phone in the kitchen. Walter answered, Carl asked for his uncle, and when his uncle came Carl said: "Funny, Mr. Bartholomew. Just like you said this morning. Handy killed his girlfriend. Then he come at me like he's gone crazy. So I had to shoot him." Pause. "No, I'll do all right. I'm gonna call them now and I know what to say. Yeah, I know. I had to protect myself, right?"

WHEN EDWARD BARTHOLOMEW HUNG UP THE PHONE, Walter asked him if everything was all right. He said yes, it was, then returned to the game. He had a slight lead on the Britisher in a game of straight pool but the kid was doing well now, working on a run of twelve or thirteen. Mr. Bartholomew would have to shoot well to win.

Ed Noon's

Minute Mysteries

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

COURTROOM KILLER

Bartree had escaped. He'd crashed out of Sing Sing the day before yesterday and Captain Mike Monks of the New York Police Department had alerted every man at his command to haul him in again. Bartree had to be stopped before he killed his third man.

The first two were the Benzi Brothers, two Italian shoemakers who'd been brave enough to put up a fight when Steve Bartree had tried to hold up their little shoe shop on Third Avenue.

And everybody knew who the third man was. Judge Cyrus Sloane, who had pronounced the death penalty on Bartree. And with the chair staring him in the face, Bartree had busted out. Nobody had to guess what he had in mind. The day he'd been sentenced to electrocution, he'd jumped to his feet in the packed courtroom and made himself pretty clear.

"I'll get you, Judge, if it's the last thing I ever do!"

It seemed like an idle boast at the time, but now with the crazed killer on the loose again, everyone seemed to remember his vicious, stupid and senseless gunning down of the shoemaker brothers for a lousy \$18.50 in the till.

When Captain Monks called me in to give him a hand with the case,

I went along with him to the courthouse where Judge Sloane was officiating that day. Monks had thrown a squad of blue and plain-clothes around the place just on the chance that Bartree would try to cut the old Judge down on the job. Monks figured that a twisted brain like Bartree's would operate on just such a notion. I was in complete agreement with him.

We sat in on the Judge's first case. Nothing happened. The court was crowded as usual because the old man was a real showman and now, with the added interest of a death threat hanging over him, he was really the center of attraction. Monks and I sat up front where we could keep an eye on him as well as the surrounding people.

Everybody looked normal and natural enough. Men, women, a few teenagers — but we kept on trying to find the ugly face of Bartree in the crowd. I reasoned that Bartree would use a gun and work up close so I paid special attention to the first three rows of seats.

There was a guy with a beard and a satchel in his lap that looked suspicious. Also a guy with a pale complexion wearing sun glasses who bothered me. Then a rough-looking customer in a pin-striped suit just behind me who was moving around too much in his seat.

Monks had made the path clear for Bartree so he could be nailed again. But it made a clay pigeon out of old Judge Sloane. A dame across the aisle from us with a trench coat tightly buttoned on the right side crossed her legs, and the bearded man suddenly coughed out loud.

I didn't wait any longer. Judge Sloane had just stood up to declare a recess when I vaulted over Mike Monks' knees, sprang across the aisle and descended on Bartree, catching him flush on the chin with a hard-handed right cross just as his hand was coming out of the folds of the coat with a wicked looking .45.

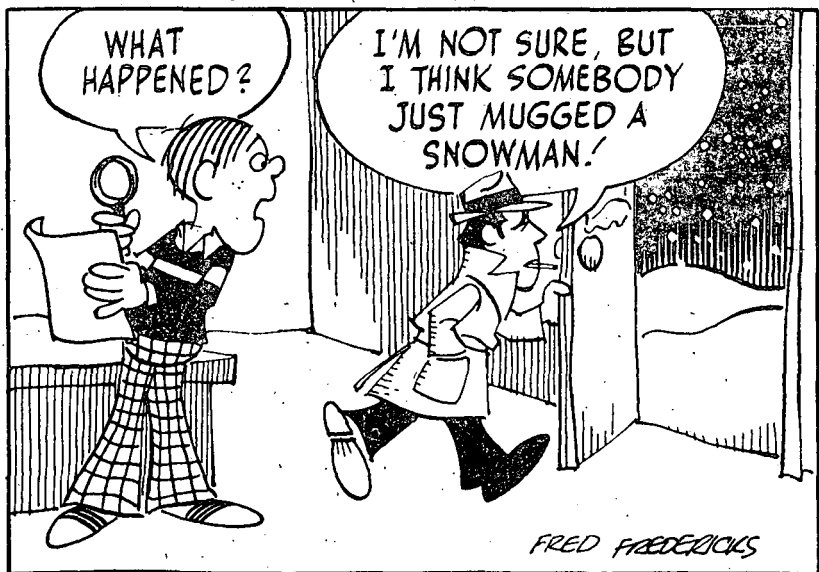
Monks was glad he'd brought me along but I'm no genius. Bartree had made one big mistake. And I'd spotted it. If I hadn't, Judge Sloane would be as dead as they make them right this minute.

THE SOLUTION

The courtroom was a riot scene as I pulled a blond wig and glasses off the powdered, ugly face of Steve Bartree. Bartree's disguise as a woman was great. Except for one thing. From force of habit, he'd buttoned his coat on the *right* side. Just like a man. A woman always buttons up on the *left* side.

MIKE SHAMUS

by FRED FREDERICKS



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STIFF COMPETITION

(BOOK REVIEWS) by JOHN BALL

There is a new and impressive book on the history of detective fiction: *And Always a Detective* by R.F. Stewart. This work first appeared in England and has just been made available here in the United States by David and Charles, Inc. North Pomfret, Vermont 05053. An associate of Manchester University, Mr. Stewart is himself an enthusiast of crime fiction and a collector of the genre. The book is sub-titled "Chapters on the History of Detective Fiction" which well defines the author's intentions. He writes with a clear, somewhat academic style, but is fortunately not above an occasional flash of wit, such as referred to a matter that, if known, "would incite rotations in graveyards all over the world."

Much of the book is given to the author's premise that detective fiction must be classified as second rate and not in the same category as serious literature. He elaborates this point at some length. It cannot be denied that much crime writing *is* of an ephemeral nature and the dust jacket illustration, particularly in England, tends to support his premise. However, the implication is made that all "serious" novels are well-written and of more substantial importance. As one who has labored in both vineyards, and is continuing to do so, we take issue here. There is some very good serious fiction, and much that is not only second rate, but third. Precisely the same may be said of detective fiction. Certainly the better works of Graham Greene, John Le Carre, and a number of others we might name, do rank with the best, and we mean the very best, of contemporary "serious" fiction. And we are not resorting to that now venerable ploy of pointing out that the best murder story yet published is called *Macbeth*.

This is certainly a book for every serious student of the detective and crime genre. However, we must point out the price, which in the States is \$35.50. Perhaps this is not a crime, but it must be considered as at least a misdemeanor.



Now for a discovery. Barbara Paul has given us five previous books, but she has rung the bell loud and clear with a fascinating new work called *Liars & Tyrants & People Who Turn Blue*. Don't let the title turn you off, for this is an absolutely captivating story about a woman who

can see auras and thereby determine if people are telling the truth, or not. When it is discovered that she never misses, the police make good use of her abilities. Then, to the reader's rewarding pleasure, she is taken to the United Nations where a very important matter is under debate and conflicting evidence is being offered.

Liars, etc. is a witty book, swift to read, and highly entertaining. Among its many assets is a sister of the human lie detector who is a most reluctant concert pianist. She is great, but afraid to play in public. She alone is worth the price of the book, and the finish, involving her, is a beautiful device. You'll love every page of this one. (Doubleday, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

One of the things that distresses a reader is to find that serious effort has been put into a book which directly parallels several other recent entries in the field. By the time that it appears, the bloom is definitely off the rose. A case in point is *The Chameleon Variant* by Carol K. Mack and David Ehrenfeld, M.D., the distinguished professor of biology at Rutgers University. Miss Mack writes very well indeed and the medical expertise provided by Dr. Ehrenfeld is beyond question. But it's the same story once more of a deadly new virus, developed in secret, being accidentally turned loose in a community where it swiftly generates compound terror. Since *The Andromeda Strain* there have been at least four other books with this identical plot structure. The strong point of this new entry is the very expert medical background which adds much to the validity of the story. The weak point is the use of the United States government as the villain with an implication that the FBI is beating up people in subways in order to keep secret something that is already widely broadcast. Perhaps Miss Mack has been reading Robert Ludlum, who did not hesitate to depict the murder (yes, we said murder) of J. Edgar Hoover with the sure and certain knowledge that you cannot libel the dead. The writing is fast moving, but the complex maze of characters is very difficult to keep sorted out. (The Dial Press, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Of genuine interest this month is the appearance of a handsome new magazine called *Clues: a Journal of Detection*. While it is technically a magazine, the first issue is in actuality a well produced soft cover book which is certain to become a collector's item within a short time. Two issues are to be published each year at \$5 each or \$10 for an annual subscription.

The first issue is largely devoted to John D. MacDonald, but there is also a fascinating account of a publisher who asked two young authors to dinner and then commissioned them to each write a piece for his magazine. Both accepted. Oscar Wilde submitted *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; Arthur Conan Doyle brought in Dr. Watson's manuscript of *The Sign of the Four*. This is pretty heady stuff, and the magazine is filled with much more. Skip dinner if you must, but send your subscription to the Bowling Green University Popular Press; Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.



The vast audience that John Dickson Carr commanded during his lifetime will be delighted to know that there is a new book called *The Door to Doom* by the master of the locked room and the impossible crime. After a fine introduction by Douglas G. Greene, the book goes on to provide a treasure house of little-known Carr writings, including his very first short story. It is not a masterpiece, but it shows flashes of what was to come. The collection is a very fine one with a few short stories of detection (with Bencolin), some of the elusive radio plays, three stories of the supernatural (and who could do them better), two Sherlockian parodies for the faithful, and two essays, including the memorable *The Grandest Game in the World*. All these riches are offered by Harper and Row for \$12.95.



A new book by Michael Gilbert, the London solicitor cum novelist, is always a good excuse for a sleepless night. We have just been given *The Killing of Katie Steelstock*, an involved but fascinating police procedural about the murder of a TV personality. To use a pilot's expression, she buys the farm in the little village from which she comes. There are lots of carefully interlocking clues, some more deaths, and a finale that holds water at the finish. For extra measure there is a very good trial scene thrown in. (Harper and Row, \$10.95)



Jack Higgins new book, *Solo*, would be a shattering winner were it not for the fact that after a smash beginning the author goes into a long flashback that could easily have been avoided. After this is finally over, a genuinely exciting story is unfolded about a renowned concert pianist who is also a highly trained hit man. When he accidentally runs down the daughter of a British commando who is every bit as good as he is, and perhaps a bit more, the battle is on. Add to this the fact that they both love the same girl and you've got strong medicine for the demise of boredom. The author, who is well-known for *The Eagle Has Landed*, also writes as Harry Patterson. (Stein and Day, \$11.95)

Continued on page 110

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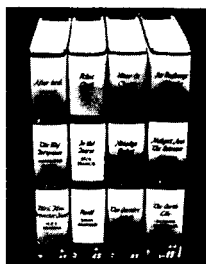
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